

5. RICE DISHES

Unlike the many sauce and stew recipes set forth in the previous sections, the following are dishes having rice as their base. They do not produce sauce and, other than the first recipe below, may be eaten with no accompaniment. The first recipe here is itself the accompaniment: plain white rice meant to be eaten, not by itself, but together with sauce dishes.

A central feature of Iraqi rice cooking is the production of *hkaka* – a layer of crisp rice produced by slow cooking. This is similar to the Persian *tadig*, but whereas *tadig* is thick crisp rice served with no loose rice, the Iraqis would serve *hkaka* together with the loose rice that produced it. In order to make good *hkaka*, it is required that the chef use a high quality pot with thick walls that conducts heat well. A thin, poor pot will yield burned rice rather than nice, brown *hkaka*.

Before the invention of non-stick coatings, such as Teflon, *hkaka* would stick to the inside surface of the pot and had to be scraped out of it. In Iraq, there was a special metal spatula, called a *kifkir*, invented for this purpose. The rice would then be served as a mound, sprinkled with pieces of *hkaka*, on a large serving dish. The invention of non-stick coating now allows for presentation of the beautiful *hkaka* cake: A cake-like shell of crisped rice, containing loose rice underneath. Because Iraqi cuisine is meant to be brought to the table in serving dishes, as opposed to being served plated, each dinner guest has the added satisfaction of watching the server break into the *hkaka* cake with a spoon and scoop the light, fluffy rice underneath onto his plate, together with the *hkaka*.

Again, for any of the following dishes that call for *hkaka*, it is important to use a good pot with thick walls, and, for the *hkaka* cake, a pot with non-stick coating. To extract the *hkaka* cake, agitate the pot to make sure its contents are released from the inside surface. If the contents appear to be stuck to the pot, use a non-stick spatula to loosen the rice. This can usually be done by working the spatula down the inner sides of the pot to the bottom surface, where the contents can then be freed from any adhesion to the non-stick coating. Once the contents of the pot are loose, place a large serving platter face down over the top of the pot, grasp the handles of the pot and the serving platter together, so that the platter does not shift, and flip the pot over with one swift and smooth motion, so that the pot now sits upside down over the serving platter. Slowly lift the pot off of the platter to reveal the rice dish and its beautiful layer of *hkaka*.

38. ***Timman Abyadh & Hkaka*** (Plain white rice with a layer of crisped rice) (Accompanying staple)

Most Iraqi main course dishes produce generous quantities of sauce. This is certainly true for the stews, to which an entire section of this book is devoted. But it is also the case for many other dishes not categorized as a stew. Virtually all of the sauce dishes are intended to be eaten with rice as the accompanying staple. The rice absorbs the exquisite sauces and takes on the flavor of the dish served with it. It is traditional to serve the rice with *hkaka*.

2 cups long grain, white, basmati rice, washed and soaked
2 tablespoons oil
1 teaspoon salt

Put 2 cups of water, oil and salt into a pot, set on high flame, and cover. Drain rice so that little water remains. When water in pot boils, lower flame to medium, add drained rice, stir briefly, and cover. When water evaporates, lower flame to low, stir briefly, and cover. Cook for 10 or 15 more minutes until ready. For *hkaka*, let it sit on low flame for ½ - 1 hour.

39. ***Plau B'jeej*** (Red rice with roasted chicken)

2 ½ cups of long grain, white, basmati rice, washed
1 whole chicken, cut into sections and skinned: 2 drumsticks, 2 thighs with back, 1 or 2 breasts (depending on size of chicken)
2 small onions
2 heaping teaspoons tomato paste
2 tablespoons oil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ - ½ teaspoon cayenne
½ teaspoon turmeric
¼ - ½ cup almond slivers or pine nuts (optional and preferable)
¼ cup raisins (optional)

In a large, thick walled pot, preferably coated with a non-stick surface, lay chicken pieces at the bottom of the pot, with the fleshier sides down. Add oil, onions (whole), pepper, cayenne, and ¼ cup water. Set on medium flame and cover. When the water evaporates, uncover and allow the chicken to brown slightly. Then add 1/5 cup water and cover. When the water evaporates, allow the chicken to brown further. When a nice, reddish-brown color is achieved, turn off flame, remove the chicken and onions, and place them on a plate. Dissolve the tomato paste into 2 ½ cups of water and add to

pot, together with the salt and turmeric. Set pot on medium flame and cover. Drain the rice to remove as much water as possible. When the water in the pot boils, add the drained rice, stir, and cover. When the liquid evaporates, lower flame to low, stir briefly, and cover. When the rice is ready, place the chicken and onions on top of the rice (do not mix), cover, and place of very low flame. Let sit for 30 minutes to 1 hour for *hkaka*.

If using almonds/pine nuts, or both nuts and raisins: While rice is sitting on low flame, sauté almond slivers or pine nuts (and raisins, if raisins are used) in a pan glazed or sprayed with a little bit of oil. When nuts are brown remove and set aside.

To serve, remove chicken and onions from over the rice and set them aside. Scrape rice and *hkaka* out of the pot or, if using a non-stick pot, invert pot over a serving platter to produce a *hkaka* cake. Array chicken pieces around the rice and place the onions on top. Sprinkle toasted nuts (and raisins) over the rice. This is traditionally served with salad and steamed *lubia* (fresh black eyed peas cooked with the stalk) as accompaniment.

40. ***Parida Plau*** (Red rice in a dough shell)

This dish is similar in taste to *plau b'jeej*, but its presentation is different and rather striking, and the delicious shell of French dough adds an dimension of both taste and texture absent from the other preparation.

2 ½ cups of long grain, white, basmati rice, washed
1 whole chicken, cut into sections and skinned: 2 drumsticks, 2 thighs with back, 1 or 2 breasts (depending on size of chicken)
½ - 2/3 lbs. French dough
2 small onions
2 heaping teaspoons tomato paste
2 tablespoons oil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ - ½ teaspoon cayenne
½ teaspoon turmeric
Dusting of flour on a smooth surface
¼ - ½ cup almond slivers or pine nuts (optional and preferable)
¼ cup raisins (optional)

Lay chicken pieces at the bottom of a large pot, with the fleshier sides down. Add oil, onions (whole), pepper, cayenne, and ¼ cup water. Set on medium flame and cover. When the water evaporates, uncover and allow the chicken to brown slightly. Then add 1/5 cup water and cover. When the water evaporates, allow the chicken to brown fur-

ther. When a nice, reddish-brown color is achieved, turn off flame, remove the chicken and onions, place the chicken on a plate, and discard the onions. Dissolve the tomato paste into 2 ½ cups of water and add to pot, together with the salt and turmeric. Set pot on medium flame and cover. Drain the rice to remove as much water as possible. When the water in the pot boils, add the drained rice, stir, and cover. When the liquid evaporates, lower flame to low, stir briefly, and cover. While rice is cooking, shred chicken parts and discard all bones. Add the shredded chicken to the rice and mix very gently, so as not to break rice. Let sit for a few minutes until rice is cooked and remove from flame. (Do not allow *hkaka* to form.)

Place a section of French dough, a bit over ½ lbs., on a smooth surface dusted with white flour and flatten with a rolling pin into a large, thin round (but not too thin). Place the dough inside of a large, thick walled, non-stick pot (for this dish it is required to use a pot coated with a non-stick surface). Manipulate the dough so that it evenly covers the bottom of the pot and lines the inner sides up to the point where the rice is expected to reach. Smooth out all wrinkles and deformities so that the dough is even and looks nice. Spoon all of the rice-chicken mixture from the other pot into the dough-lined pot. Cover and set on a low flame, non very low. Cook for 15 minutes, occasionally moving the pot around so that the flame reaches all parts of the bottom of the pot. To serve, invert pot over a serving platter, as though for *hkaka*. This should produce a beautiful, brown, cake-like dough shell, filled with the rich taste of *plau b'jeej*.

41. **Plau B'semak** (Red rice with fish and onions)

2 ½ cups long grain, white, basmati rice, washed and soaked
1 ½ lbs. boneless filet of Whitefish, Orange Roughy, or Halibut (preferably fresh)
3 medium size onions, sliced and separated into rings
2 medium size ripe tomatoes
2 heaping teaspoons tomato paste
4 tablespoons oil
2 teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ teaspoon cayenne
1 heaping tablespoon Numi Basra
A dusting of white flour on a plate

Lay fish out on a surface and squeeze a little lemon juice on the exposed side of the fish. Sprinkle a little salt and pepper on the fish as well. Let the fish sit for at least 10 minutes. (If the fish is frozen, which is not ideal, squeeze excess water out of the fish.) Put a little bit of oil in a frying pan (or spray a coating of oil) and set pan on medium flame. Lightly dip the pieces of fish on the flour-dusted plate, on both sides, and place them in the pan (do not stack). Fry fish lightly on both sides, until light brown in color.

Do not fry any darker than light brown. Remove to a paper towel lined plate. Repeat until all the fish is fried. When the fish cools slightly – just enough so that it can be handled – pick up each piece of fish and break in apart on a separate plate into silver dollar size piece. While flaking apart fish, use bare hands to check for bones. Remove any remaining bones.

During this process, perhaps while the fish is absorbing the lemon and salt, dissolve tomato paste into 2 ½ cups of water and put in a pot, together with 2 tablespoons oil and 1 teaspoon salt. Set pot on high flame and cover. Drain rice so that little water remains. When the liquid in the pot boils, lower flame to medium, add rice, stir, and cover. When liquid evaporates, lower flame to low, stir rice, and cover. Cook for 15 minutes and remove from flame, so that no *hkaka* forms.

In a good, thick walled pot or deep saucepan, preferably with a non-stick coating, put 2 tablespoons oil, onion rings, pepper, and cayenne and sauté on medium flame until the onion rings are soft and golden. Add a pinch of salt during the sauté and stir. Turn off flame. Scatter onion rings so that they are evenly distributed along the bottom of the pot and then add the tomato slices, also evenly distributed. Sprinkle a little more salt over the tomatoes. Add 2/3 of the fish pieces, also evenly distributed. Sprinkle the Numi Basra over the fish. Add ½ the quantity of rice (by now cooked) over the fish. Set the pot or saucepan on a low flame and add the remaining 1/3 of the fish, evenly distributed. Then add the rest of the rice and cover pot. Cook on low flame for about 30 minutes. To serve, scoop out or, if using a non-stick pot, invert pot over a large serving dish.

42. **Plau Baqulli** (Rice with fava beans and dill)

2 ½ cups long grain, white, basmati rice, washed and soaked

1 ¼ lbs. fresh fava beans

¾ lbs. lean stew meat, cut into small cubes

1 medium size onion, finely diced

tomato paste ??????

1 bunch of dill (stems together should be about the size of a half-dollar)

3 tablespoons oil

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon pepper

¼ teaspoon cayenne

Use a thick walled pot, preferably with a non-stick coating. Put oil and meat into pot and set on medium flame. Sauté meat until it slightly browns, then add onions, pepper and cayenne and continue sautéing until the onions are soft and golden. Add ½ cup water, cover, bring to boil, and lower flame to low. When water evaporates check meat; if not

tender, add some more water and repeat process.

While meat is cooking, prepare fava beans and dill. Remove the green stalks from the fava beans and discard. If the beans themselves are old and hard, then peel them (otherwise do not peel). Wash the beans and set them aside. Wash the dill well and cut into 1-inch sections. Discard and coarse portions of the stems.

When meat is cooked and no water remains, dissolve tomato paste into 2 ½ cups of water and add to pot, together with fava beans, dill, and salt. Raise flame to medium, stir, and cover. Drain rice so that little water remains. When the liquid in the pot begins to boil, add the rice, stir, and cover. When the water evaporates, lower flame to low, and gently stir the rice, so as not to break the fava beans. Leave on low flame for 10 minutes. For *hkaka*, leave for ½ - 1 hour. To serve, scoop out or, if using a non-stick pot, invert over a large serving dish.

43. ***Qur'iyi M'katra*** (Squash with rice, in the same pot)

The most delightful aspect of the dish is that the rice absorbs the richness of meat, the sweetness of squash, and the tanginess of Numi Basra from a mixture that is cooked in the same pot with it. The resulting taste is exceptional.

2 cups of long grain, white, basmati rice, washed and soaked
1 ½ lbs. zucchini or white squash, peeled and sliced into thick rounds
¾ lbs. lean stew meat, cut into cubes
1 medium size onion, finely diced
4 small tomatoes, peeled and cut into small pieces (or 1 can, if using canned tomatoes)
2 heaping teaspoons tomato paste
4 tablespoons oil
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ - ½ teaspoon cayenne
1-2 teaspoons *Numi Basra*

Put oil and meat into a large pot and sauté on medium flame until the meat browns lightly. Add onions, pepper, and cayenne into the pot, and continue sautéing until the onions are soft and golden. Add 1 cup of water, cover, bring to boil, and lower flame to low. Let cook until the meat is tender. Reduce until most of the liquid evaporates. Add tomato pieces (but do not yet add the liquid from the can, if using canned tomatoes) and sauté on medium flame until they are soft. (If using canned tomatoes, now add the liquid from the can and reduce until liquid evaporates.) Add ½ cup water and the zucchini/squash and cover. Cook until all the water evaporates, at which point the zucchini/squash should be partially cooked. Using a spoon, push the mixture to one side of the

pot – although it has a tendency to flow back to the empty side of the pot, the mixture should be thick enough to maintain some integrity despite the pressure. Dissolve tomato paste into 2 cups of water, add the salt to it, and pour the liquid into the empty side of the pot. Bring to a boil. Add rice and stir the rice into the water, taking care to minimize disturbance to the squash/meat mixture. Cover and leave on flame until the water evaporates. Lower flame to low and stir the rice only, again taking care to minimize disturbance to the squash/meat mixture. Sprinkle the Numi Baṣra on the zucchini side of the pot only, and agitate slightly with a spoon so that the spice is distributed evenly over the squash. Cover, and leave on a very low flame for 45 minutes to obtain hkaka.

To serve, scoop squash-meat mixture onto only side of a service dish and the rice onto the other side of the dish. Or, if you have used a non-stick pot, invert over a large serving platter. Either method should allow you to serve this dish while maintaining the integrity of its two components.

44. **Tbeet** (sometimes, “**Tinoori**”) (Chicken and chicken skin with stuffing and rice)

Tbeet, whose name comes from the verb meaning “to remain”, is the Iraqi variant of the slow cooked Shabbat (Sabbath) lunch meal. Because the laws of Shabbat prevent the initiation of any cooking, every Jewish community has its own “*hamin*”, or long-cooked dish. Just as *chulent* is the *hamin* of Jews from Eastern Europe, *Tbeet* is the Iraqi version, and many members of the community would consider no Shabbat complete without it.

Aside from its religious and familial significance, this is a stunning dish in its own right. The flavors are marvelous – red rice rich with the flavor of chicken stock, tender chicken meat, crisped chicken skin, and a rice-based stuffing fragrant of cinnamon, cardamom, and rose petals. And if done correctly, the appearance is no less impressive: A wreath of crisped rice frames both a roasted stuffed chicken and a stuffed chicken skin that has expanded to itself resemble a chicken.

The remarkable flavors and impressive appearance of this dish have caused it to become one of the exemplars of Iraqi Jewish cuisine, and a cause for non-Iraqis to beg for Shabbat lunch invitations from their Iraqi friends.

3 ½ cups long grain, white, basmati rice
1 large, whole chicken, not skinned, having good skin that is not torn
1 lbs. lean stew meat, cut into small chunks (¼ - ½ inch cubes)
3 medium size tomatoes, preferably very red, diced into small pieces
1 small tomato
1 small onion
3 teaspoons tomato paste

2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon pepper
½ - 1 teaspoon cayenne
4-5 tablespoons oil
5 tablespoons *Bharat*

Special Equipment:

Heat diffuser for gas burner (or an electric element)
Needle, white thread, and a thimble

Preparation of the Chicken:

Carefully skin the chicken, taking care not to tear the skin and leaving the wings together with the skin. This is a difficult process, and the best way to do it is to begin from the neck (which should be removed, if it is still attached). Using a sharp knife, cut through the cartilage of the joint between each wing and the body of the chicken. Once the wings are separated from the body of the chicken, gradually peel away the skin from the underlying flesh, moving further and further down the body of the chicken. Use a sharp boning or pairing knife to separate the skin in those places where it is firmly attached to the meat, for example, down the back of the chicken. Upon reaching the thighs, separate the skin from the thighs, and then wrap a closed hand around the base of the leg and slowly pull outward, using considerable force, toward the foot of the drumstick. The skin should peel away as it turns inside out. At the very bottom of the chicken, toward the back of the bottom opening, is a fatty triangular “tail”. When completing the removal of the skin from the chicken, leave that triangular tail attached to the skin. (Incidentally, the Iraqi Catholics used a term of great endearment to refer to that quaint triangle: “*khashmil-Papa*” – “the nose of the Pope”.)

When the chicken is completely skinned, turn the skin inside out and wash it well in a bowl of water. Pull any loose fat and transparent membranes from the inside of the skin. After several rinses, lay the skin on a board (still inside-out). Cut off and discard the very tips of the skin on the leg (by the foot), which is usually yellowish in color and tough. Sprinkle ½ teaspoon of *Bharat* over the skin. Rub the *Bharat* into the skin, using the coarseness of the spices to sand away some more of the membranes and fat. Turn the skin over and do the same on the other side, with another ½ teaspoon of *Bharat*. Remove any excess *Bharat* and let the skin sit for a while, during which the *hashwa* may be prepared. Also rinse the skinned chicken well, both the inside cavity and the outside. Take ½ teaspoon of *Bharat* and rub it thoroughly throughout the inner cavity of the chicken.

Hashwa:

Wash and soak 1 ½ cups of the rice (leaving the other 2 cups aside) in water for at least ½ hour. After soaking, drain the rice so that no water remains and put the rice in a large mixing bowl. Add the diced meat, the diced tomatoes (not the other small tomato), 1 teaspoon salt, ¾ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon cayenne. Mix everything together. Add 3 tablespoons of *Bharat* and mix well. If the *Bharat* is weak, you may need to add more, but too much will make the *hashwa* bitter.

Filling and Cooking:

Using a needle and white thread (not doubled up), sew closed either the top (neck) or bottom opening of the chicken. Also sew closed any tears or holes in the skin – there should be few of these, if a good chicken was selected. Using a tablespoon or serving spoon, scoop the *hashwa* into the chicken skin until the skin is full. (Do not force *hashwa* into the leg openings.) There should be enough *hashwa* in the skin so that it has some integrity, but there must be some room for expansion of the rice during cooking. The intention is that when the *hashwa* expands, the skin will blow up and appear to be like a whole chicken. When enough *hashwa* has been stuffed into the skin, sew closed the remaining opening. Lay the skin on its stomach, and bring the loose skin of the legs over the back and toward each other. Sew the two flaps together (it is likely the flaps are too short to reach each other, in which case it is fine to have the thread strung across a portion of the back, between the ends of the leg flaps). Using a tablespoon or serving spoon, scoop *hashwa* into the inner cavity of the chicken (use the bottom opening). Fill the cavity completely – it is fine to stuff it well – and then pinch together the two fleshy flaps on either side of the bottom opening. Make a few passes with needle and thread through the flaps so that they remain closed.

Use a very large, thick-walled, non-stick pot. Dice the onion finely and add it to pot, together with 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon cayenne. Sauté on medium flame until the onions are soft and golden. Dice the small tomato and add that to the pot, sautéing further for a brief time. Place the stuffed skin in the pot on its stomach, and place the chicken in the pot on its side. Leave on medium flame, gently agitating the pot's contents every once and a while, until the chicken and the skin brown. The skin should turn a rich brown color on its stomach, but not too dark. Carefully turn the skin over so that it sits on its back (it is now fragile and can tear, so do this gently), and turn the chicken over so it sits on its other side. Dissolve 2 teaspoons tomato paste in 2 cups of water. When the skin and chicken have had an opportunity to brown lightly, add the water and tomato paste to the pot. Cover, bring to boil, and lower flame to low. Cook for 45 minutes. Every so often, perforate the skin with a fork having long and thin teeth (do this twice during the time the skin is cooking). After 45 minutes, test to make sure the *hashwa* is cooked – poke a fork into the skin to check that the *hashwa* is soft. When it is cooked, shut off flame, whether or not all the liquid has evaporated. Allow to cool and refrigerate until at least a few hours before ready to serve.

Cooking the Rice and Serving:

Wash and soak 2 cups of rice for at least 15 minutes. With utmost gentleness, remove the chicken from the pot and place it in a plate. (Unless the pot is big enough to do the following without removing the chicken.) Dissolve 1 teaspoon tomato paste in 2 cups of water. However, if there is liquid remaining in the pot, reduce the additional water by the same amount. Slide skin to one side of pot and add the water and tomato paste to the other side. Add 1 teaspoon salt. Set on medium flame, cover, and bring to boil. Drain rice, add it to the boiling liquid, stir, and cover pot. When the liquid evaporates, lower flame to very low. After 15 minutes, check rice to make sure it is ready. If so, push it aside slightly and place chicken back in pot so that it sits on its back. (Or, if the pot is big enough and the chicken was not removed, simply turn it very gently so that it sits on its back.) Remove the thread from the flaps of the chicken (but do not remove any thread from the skin). Set pot on top of heat diffuser or on electric element at very low heat and leave for at least an hour.

When ready to serve, invert over a large serving platter. If the chicken has been sitting on top of the rice, remove the chicken before inverting pot and then set chicken next to *hkaka* cake. Before inverting pot, make sure to loosen the contents with a spatula – *tbeet* tends to stick even to non-stick surfaces and must first be freed from any adhesion or the skin will tear when the pot is inverted. At the dinner or lunch table, the server should ensure that each guest is given a little taste from each component of the *tbeet*: The rich, flavorful exterior rice with *hkaka*, the chicken and its stuffing, and the crisp chicken skin and its stuffing. Take care not to allow any thread to make its way onto a guest's plate.

45. **Pacha** (Stuffed beef or lamb intestines)

Considered one of the delicacies of Iraqi cuisine, *pacha* is the stuffed intestines (“*sijuq*”) of beef or lamb. The stuffing is virtually identical to that of *tbeet*, but the outer shell gives this dish its own unique, and marvelous flavor. Traditionally, *pacha* made with lamb was considered the more sophisticated and the more luxurious dish.

***** [NEED RECIPE]

46. **Kichri** (Rice and lentils with garlic and cumin) and **Kichri M'Tabbag**

Kichri is a wonderful dish, redolent of garlic and cumin and rich with butter. Its fame within Iraqi Jewish cuisine is well deserved. It is also one of several dishes within the cuisine that is associated with particular Jewish occasions. In many Iraqi homes, it would be unimaginable to celebrate the holiday of Shavuot (tabernacles) without gener-

ous helpings of *kichri*. And some Iraqis have a tradition of serving *kichri* every Friday night, for Shabbat (Sabbath) eve dinner.

2 cups long grain, white, basmati rice, washed and soaked for about 2 hours
1 cup red lentils, washed quickly immediately before preparation
1 small onion, diced
2 heaping teaspoons tomato paste
4-6 cloves garlic
2 tablespoons oil
¾ stick high quality, unsalted butter
2 ½ teaspoons cumin
1-2 teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ - ½ teaspoon cayenne
½ teaspoon turmeric (optional)

Additional Ingredients for ***Kichri M'Tabbag***:

1 large onion
1 large ripe tomato
¼ lbs. white Bulgarian cheese
GET CORRECT CHEESE!!!
¾ tablespoon corn oil
Dash of black pepper
Dash of cayenne

Put oil, onion, pepper, and cayenne in a large pot and sauté on medium flame until the onions are soft and golden. Dissolve tomato paste into 2 ¾ cups of water and add to pot, together with salt and turmeric (if using turmeric). Cover. As water heats to boiling point, wash and drain lentils and drain soaked rice to remove as much liquid as possible. Mix rice and lentils together. When water boils, add rice-lentil mixture to pot, stir, and cover. When water has evaporated (approximately 5 minutes), lower flame to very low and cover.

While rice is cooking, peel and dice garlic very finely, or mash it with a mortar and pestle. Mix the garlic and the cumin. (If beginning with whole cumin seeds, pound the seeds first with a mortar and pestle, then add garlic and pound both into a paste.) Place butter in a frying pan. Check to see if the rice and lentils are cooked. When it is sufficiently cooked, place frying pan over a low flame and add garlic-cumin mixture. Sauté the garlic and cumin with the butter, taking care to stir constantly lest the butter begin to smoke. Continue sautéing until the butter begins to brown and take on an odor of hazelnuts (*beurre noisette*), and the garlic and cumin give off a rich sautéed smell. When ready, pour butter evenly over the rice and lentils in the pot and stir contents of pot.

Take care to stir well, but gently, as the lentils are fragile. Let it sit on a low flame for another 5 minutes and serve. For *hkaka*, leave on a low flame for ½ hour, but only if pot is thick and conducts heat well, otherwise it can burn.

Serving Options:

The finished *kichri* can be scooped out of the pot (gently) and into a serving dish. Or, if a non-stick pot was used, it can be inverted over a serving platter for a *kichri hkaka* cake. Either way, it is traditional to serve the *kichri* with a fried egg over the rice, or a dollop of yogurt or sour cream, or both fried egg and yogurt/sour cream. But by far the most impressive serving option requires the further preparation known as “*kichri m'tabag*”.

For ***Kichri M'Tabag*** (references are to list of additional ingredients, above):

Before rice-lentil mixture finishes cooking, put the oil into a large non-stick pot. (A non-stick pot is required, and its walls must be thick, so that it conducts heat well.) Cut the onion in half and then thinly slice each half, so that the outcome is semi-circular onion strips. Add the onion strips to the pot, together with the pepper and cayenne, and sauté on medium flame until the onion is soft and golden. Turn off flame if needed. Peel the tomato and slice it thinly. Distribute the onion strips evenly along the bottom of the pot, then lay the tomato slices over the onion, so as to form an even layer of tomato slices. Set on medium flame for a few minutes, until the tomato slices soften. Again, turn off flame if needed. Slice the cheese as thinly as possible and lay the cheese slices on the tomato, to create an even layer of cheese. When the *kichri* finishes cooking (do not allow *hkaka* to form), gently scoop all of the *kichri* out of its own pot and into the pot with the layers of onions, tomato, and cheese. Pat down slightly, so that the *kichri* is well settled in the new pot. Cover and set on a low flame for about 30 minutes, occasionally shifting the pot's position over the burner so that the direct heat reaches all areas of the pot. When ready to serve, invert pot over a serving dish – like with *hkaka* – and serve.