

More Than Apples and Honey: Tasting and Learning about the Symbolic Foods of Rosh Hashanah

Source Sheet by Adam Berman

Horayot 12a:9-12

The Sages taught: One anoints the kings only upon a spring, as an omen, so that their kingdom will continue like a spring, **as it is stated** with regard to the coronation of Solomon before the death of David: **“And the king said unto them: Take with you the servants of your lord, and let Solomon my son ride upon my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Tzadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel and sound the shofar and say: Long live King Solomon”** (I Kings 1:33–34). § Apropos good omens, the Gemara cites a statement that **Rabbi Ami said: This person who seeks to know if he will complete his year or if he will not, i.e., whether or not he will remain alive in the coming year, let him light a lamp, during the ten days that are between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, in a house in which wind does not blow. If its light continues to burn, he knows that he will complete his year. And one who seeks to conduct a business venture and wishes to know if he will succeed or if he will not succeed, let him raise a rooster. If the rooster grows fat and healthy, he will succeed. One who seeks to embark on a journey and wishes to know if he will return and come to his home or if he will not, let him go to a dark [*dahavara*] house. If he sees the shadow of a shadow he shall know that he will return and come home.** The Sages reject this: **This omen is not a significant matter. Perhaps he will be disheartened** if the omen fails to appear, **and his fortune will suffer** and it is this that causes him to fail. **Abaye said: Now that you said that an omen is a significant matter, a person should always be accustomed to seeing these on Rosh HaShana: Squash, and fenugreek, leeks, and chard, and dates,** as each of these grows quickly and serves as a positive omen for one’s actions during the coming year.

Rabbi Menachem Meiri, Chibur HaTeshuvah, pp. 265-266

In order to arouse themselves to focus on God and to place the awe of Him in their consciousness without sinning, they developed the practice of placing gourd, fenugreek, leek, cabbage, and dates on the table. This was done corresponding to that which was cited in Tractate Horiyot and Tractate Kritot: **“Now that you have determined that omens are significant, at the beginning of every year every person should ...”**

And in order not to mistake this practice for sorcery, God forbid, they would pronounce upon these things words that highlighted forgiveness and awaken feelings of repentance. When they said that an omen is significant they meant that it could affect a person just by

him being aware of the omens placed before him, even without explicitly reciting prayers over them. That is why at first they would simply look at them during the meal. However, because the Sages were concerned that people might become preoccupied with satisfying their appetites and become distracted from focusing on the spiritual importance of the day and the awe of judgment, therefore they began to recite special prayers over these foods in order to raise people's consciousness.

Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 583:1-2

(1) (1) One should eat beans, leeks, beets, dates, and pumpkin. And as one eats the beans (rubiya), they say: God, may our merits increase (yirbu)! Eating leeks (karti), they say: God, may our enemies be wiped out (yekartu)! Eating dates (tamri), say: God, may our enemies disappear (yetamu)! Eating pumpkin (kra), say: God, may our judgement be ripped up (yikra) and may our merits be called out (yikrau) before You! RAMA: Some have a custom of eating a sweet apple in honey, and saying: May a sweet year be renewed on us! This is what we do. Some eat pomegranates, and say: may our merits be as many as pomegranate seeds! And we are accustomed to eat fatty meat and all sorts of sweets.

(2) Eat a head of a lamb saying: Let us be as a head and not a tail. It is also a remembrance of the ram of Isaac. Rema: There are those who are careful not to eat nuts, as the word "egoz" in gematriah [is equal to the value of] chet (sin). They also cause a lot of excess saliva and phloem and cause abrogation of prayers. They also go to a river and say the verse: "You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). There are also those who do not sleep during Rosh Hashana during the day, and this is the correct thing to do.

Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 129:9

(9) ... You should also eat vegetables the names of which, in the language of your country, allude to good things, such as in our country, carrots (*mehren*) [*mehren* means to increase] and you should say *Yehi ratzon sheyirbu zechuyoseinu* [May it be Your will that our merits increase.] Some people have the custom to eat an elaborate fish course, symbolizing the blessing of fertility like the fish. The fish should not be cooked in vinegar because we must not eat sour or bitter foods on *Rosh Hashanah*. You should eat choice meats and all kinds of sweets. It is also customary not to eat nuts and almonds, because the numerical value of עגוז *egoz* (nut) is 17, the same as חט *cheit*, which means sin. Also, nuts increase phlegm and mucus which interferes with praying. It is proper to study Torah during the meal. Some have the custom of studying the *Mishnah, Maseches Rosh Hashanah*.

Rosh Hashanah Seder



התנועה המסורתית
The Masorti Movement

The festive meal on the Eve of Rosh Hashanah has come to include the custom of the Rosh Hashanah Seder in which we eat various fruits and vegetables that symbolize - by taste or the sound of their name - the blessings we wish to bestow upon the new year.

The Seder has changed with time. The custom dates back to the days of the Talmud, but it has since transformed, elaborated by the different edot (Jewish ethnic groups) and in the various diasporas.

The blessings and simanim (signs) you will find below are those that have been adopted and they reflect diverse ethnic origins and traditions.

We encourage you to adopt these blessings and foods, or be inspired by them and add your own.

Apple in Honey

A merging of the Geonim's custom of eating honey with the French-Jewish custom of eating apple. Originally Ashkenazi, the custom has become common among Sephardim too.

Hold the apple in your hand and say the following blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree.

Take a piece of apple, dip in honey, taste it and say the following

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוֹקָה

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that You renew for us a good and sweet year.

Kara (Gourd)

The Aramaic word kara is pronounced similarly to the Hebrew kraa (to tear/rip).

Take a little piece of the Kara, bless the following and immediately eat:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the earth.

After we tasted the Kara, we say the following:

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּקַרַע רֵעַ גֹּזֵר דֵּינֵנוּ וְיִקְרָאוּ

לְפָנֶיךָ מַעֲשֵׂינֵנוּ הַטּוֹבִים

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that the decree of our sentence be torn asunder and may our merits be proclaimed before You.



Rubia (black-eyed peas)

The Aramaic word for black-eyed peas - rubia - sounds like the Hebrew words - rav (many) or ribui (abundance). The black-eyed peas symbolize abundant good fortune and good virtues.

Taste a little of the Rubia and say:

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂיִרְבוּ זְכוּתֵינוּ וְתִרְבֶּה הַבְּרָכָה בְּכָל עַמְלָנוּ

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that our merits increase and that the fruit of our labor be abundant.



Karatei (leek)

The Aramaic word sounds like the Hebrew word karet (cutting off/to be cut off).



Taste a little of the Karatei and say:

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שְׂיִכְרְתוּ אוֹיְבֵנוּ וְכָל-מְבַקְשֵׁי רַעְתָּנוּ

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that our enemies and all those who seek our harm be cut off.

Beetroot (The Hebrew word for beetroot - selek - sounds like siluk (to remove)

Taste a little of the Selek and say

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שְׂיִסְתַּלְקוּ עוֹוֹנוֹתֵינוּ.

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that our sins be removed.



Dates

The date is the honey of "the land flowing with milk and honey".

The Hebrew word - tamar - is reminiscent of the word tam (to end/cease).



Taste a little of the Tamar and say

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שְׂיִתְמוּ אוֹיְבֵנוּ וְשִׂנְאֵינוּ וְכָל-מְבַקְשֵׁי רַעְתָּנוּ

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that our enemies, haters, and all those who seek our harm cease.

Pomegranate

The Pomegranates are filled with numerous sweet seeds, traditionally associated with the 613 mitzvot (commandments) of Torah.

After tasting a few of the pomegranate seeds say the following:

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שְׂנִהְיֶה מְצוֹת כְּרַמּוֹן

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that we be as full of mitzvot as the pomegranate is full of seeds.



Fish head

The head of the fish symbolizes the beginning of the year. The fish itself represents fertility.

Taste a little of the fish and say

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שְׂנִהְיֶה לְרֵאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב,

וְנִפְרֶה וְנִרְבֶּה כְּדָגִים.

May it be Your will, Lord our God and the God of our fathers and mothers, that we be as the head and not as the tail, and that we be fruitful and multiply like fish.

