

THE FOODS OF ROSH HASHANA AND SEDER ROSH HASHANA

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Based on Responsa by Rav David Golinkin of the Schechter Institute of Jerusalem
and of Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, former Israeli Chief Rabbi



Nechemiah 8:1-9

א וַיֵּאסְפוּ כָּל-הָעָם, כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, אֶל-הֶרְחוֹב, אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמַּיִם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לְעִזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר--לְהֵבִיא אֶת-סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל. ב וַיָּבִיא עִזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה לִפְנֵי הַקְּהָל, מֵאִישׁ וְעַד-אִשָּׁה, וְכָל, מִבֵּין לְשֹׁמֵעַ--בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד, לַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי. ג וַיִּקְרָא-בּוֹ לִפְנֵי הֶרְחוֹב אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר-הַמַּיִם, מִן-הָאֹרֶז עַד-מַחְצֵית הַיּוֹם--נֹגֵד הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂימ, וְהַמְּבִינִים; וְאֲזַנִּי כָּל-הָעָם, אֶל-סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה. ד וַיַּעֲמֵד עִזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר, עַל-מַגְדֵּל-עֵץ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לַדָּבָר, וַיַּעֲמֵד אֶצְלוֹ מִתְתִּיָּה וְשֹׁמֵעַ וְעֲנָיָה וְאוּרִיָּה וְחַלְקִיָּה וּמַעֲשִׂיָּה, עַל-יָמֵינוּ; וּמִשְׁמָאלוֹ, פְּדִיָּה וּמִישָׁאֵל וּמִלְכָּיָה וְחִשְׁבֻּדְנָה--וְזַכְרְיָה מִשְׁלָם. ה וַיִּפְתַּח עִזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר לְעֵינֵי כָּל-הָעָם, כִּי-מַעַל כָּל-הָעָם הָיָה; וּכְפָתְחוּ, עֲמֻדוֹ כָּל-הָעָם. ו וַיִּבְרָךְ עִזְרָא, אֶת-יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים הַגָּדוֹל; וַיַּעֲנוּ כָּל-הָעָם אָמֵן אָמֵן, בְּמַעַל יְדֵיהֶם, וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַיהוָה, אַפְסִים אֲרָצָה. ז וַיִּשׁוּעַ וּבְנֵי וְשִׁרְבָיָה יָמִין עֲקוּב שְׁבִתִּי הוֹדִיָּה מַעֲשִׂיָּה קְלִיטָא עֲזַרְיָה יוֹזָבֵד חֲנּוּ פְּלֵאִיָּה, וְהַלּוּיִם--מְבִינִים אֶת-הָעָם, לַתּוֹרָה; וְהָעָם, עַל-עֲמֻדָם. ח וַיִּקְרְאוּ בַסֹּפֵר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים, מִפְּרֶשׁ; וְשׁוֹם שֶׁקֶל, וּבִינּוֹ בַמִּקְרָא. ט וַיֹּאמֶר נְחֻמְיָה הוּא הַתִּרְשָׁתָא וְעִזְרָא הַכֹּהֵן הַסֹּפֵר וְהַלּוּיִם הַמְּבִינִים אֶת-הָעָם לְכָל-הָעָם, הַיּוֹם קֹדֶשׁ-הוּא לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם--אֶל-תִּתְאַבְּלוּ, וְאֶל-תִּבְכוּ: כִּי בּוֹכִים כָּל-הָעָם, כְּשָׁמְעִם אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה. י וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לְכוּ אֲכָלוּ מִשְׁמֵנִים וּשְׂתוּ מִמִּתְקִים, וּשְׁלְחוּ מְנוֹת לְאִין נֶכוֹן לוֹ--כִּי-קִדּוּשׁ הַיּוֹם, לְאֲדַנְיָנוּ; וְאֶל-תַּעֲצִבוּ, כִּי-חֲדוֹת יְהוָה הִיא מְעֻזָּכֶם.

1 All the people gathered themselves together as if one person into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which The Eternal had commanded to Israel. 2 And Ezra the priest brought the Law before the congregation, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women, and of those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the Law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Uriah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchijah, and Hashum, and Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. {P}

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people--for he was above all the people--and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 And Ezra blessed The Eternal, the great God. And all the people answered: 'Amen, Amen', with the lifting up of their hands; and they bowed their heads, and fell down before The Eternal with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, even the Levites, caused the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. 8 And they read in the book, in the Law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. {S}

9 And Nehemiah, who was the Tirshatha (Governor), and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people: 'This day is holy unto The Eternal your God; mourn not, nor weep.' For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. 10 Then he said unto them: 'Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye grieved; for the joy of The Eternal is your strength.'

1. Babylonian Talmud, Horayot 12:

תלמוד בבלי הוריות (דף יב)

”אמר אביי, השתא דאמרת סימנא מילתא היא, לעולם יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא

ורוביא, כרתי וסילקא ותמרי”.



“Abbaye said, ‘Now that you said that an omen is effective, a person should always be accustomed to see (*I'mehetzay*) *kara* (gourd/pumpkin), *rubia* (peas or beans), *kartey* (leeks or chives), *silka* (beets or beet greens) and *tamrey* (dates) on Rosh Hashanah”.

2. Babylonian Talmud, Keritot 6a:

תלמוד בבלי כריתות (דף ו ע"א)

”אמר אביי, השתא דאמרת סימנא מילתא היא, יהא רגיל איניש למיכל ריש שתא קרא

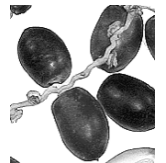
ורוביא, כרתי, סילקא ותמרי”.



“Abbaye said, ‘Now that you said that an omen is effective, a person should always be accustomed to eat (*I'mechal*) *kara* (gourd/pumpkin), *rubia* (peas or beans), *kartey* (leeks or chives), *silka* (beets or beet greens) and *tamrey* (dates) on Rosh Hashanah”.

3. Rashi to Keritot 6a

“And these [foods] – some grow quickly and some are sweet”.



4. Otzar Hageonim to Rosh Hashana 53:94

Rav Natronai Gaon (Sura, mid-ninth century) was asked about these foods and he replied that "they are a good *nahash* (divination)"

5. Sefer Hamanhig , Rav Abraham of Lunel (Toledo, 1204)

On the evening of Rosh Hashanah they put on the table special foods " *I'simana tava v'nahsha ma'alya* , for a good omen/sign and an excellent divination for the next year."

6. Malmad Hatalmidim, Rabbi Ya'akov Anatoli (Provence and Naples, 13th C.)

"Not that these foods should appear like the divination of fools and women; but since satiation makes one forget the intent of the day, a person must see these foods and think about the similar-sounding words”.

7. Otzar Hageonim to Rosh Hashanah , 52-53: 93



...And they put before them a basket which contains gourd, fava beans, leeks, vegetables, greens, and dates and they look at it and they put their hands [on each of them] and they extract from its name a good omen. On the gourd they say: " *Kara – yikara* , may our evil decree be torn". On the beans: " *Rubia – yirbu zchuyoteinu* , may our merits increase". On the leeks: " *Kartey – yikartu* , may our enemies be cut off". On the greens: " *Silka – yistalku avoneinu* , may our sins go away". On the dates: " *Tamrey – yitam avonoteinu* , may our sins end". And they add a pomegranate and they say on it: " *Nirbeh zchuyoteinu k'rimon* , may our merits increase like [the seeds of] a pomegranate"...

8. *Otzar Hageonim to Rosh Hashanah* , 53-54: 94, Responsa of Rav Natronai Gaon

...and regarding your question that we take the heads of sheep on Rosh Hashanah and eat [them] ... this is a good *nahash* (divination) and most of the people in Babylon are accustomed to this, that on Rosh Hashanah eve they take meat or heads and they cook them in barley or in something sweet... and they say: ' We will eat sweet things and meat and fatty things in order that the entire year will be sweet and pleasant and that it should not contain anything bad or any trouble.'

9. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 583-584



ויש נוהגין לאכול תפוח מתוק בדבש, ואומרים "תתחדש עלינו שנה טובה ומתוקה".

And some eat apples in honey and say "Grant us a good and sweet new year."

ויש אוכלין רמונים, ואומרים: "נרבה זכיות כרמון". ובמדינתנו אין רמונים מצויין, ונוהגין לאכול בשר שמן, וכל מיני מתיקה, שתהא חלקנו שמן ומתוק.

And some eat pomegranates and say: "Increase our merits like [the seeds of] a pomegranate. And in our land where there are no pomegranates, we eat fatty meat and all kinds of sweet things, so that our portion will be rich and sweet.

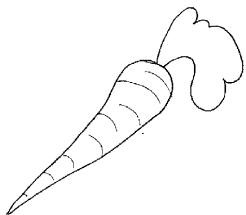


ואוכלין ראש כבש, ואומרים: "נהיה לראש ולא לזנב". ועוד: לזכר אילו של יצחק. ומפני טעם הראשון אוכלין מכל מין דג את הראש.

And we eat the head of a sheep, and say "May we be like the head and not the tail." And others: To remind us of the ram of Isaac. And for the first course we eat the head from any kind of fish.



10. *Hayye Ada 139:6*, Rabbi Avraham Danzig (Vilna, d. 1820)



We eat "*merrin* " (Yiddish for carrots) on Rosh Hashanah and we say: "May God increase our merits".

Symbolic Foods of Rosh Hashana

Apples & Honey

On Rosh HaShanah it is customary to eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize our hopes for a sweet new year.

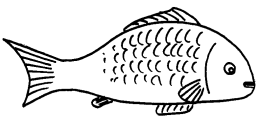


בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.
Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheynu Melech Haolam, Borei Priy Ha-Etz.
Blessed are you, The Eternal our God, Creator of the Fruit of the Tree.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה.
Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha Adonai Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu
She'techadesh Aleynu Shana Tova U'Metukah.

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that you renew us with a good and sweet year.

Fish



A Sephardic custom is to begin the holiday meal with a whole fish, as a wish for prosperity, fertility and good luck for the coming year.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנִּפְרֶה וְנִרְבֶּה כְּדָגִים.

Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha Adonai Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu She'nifreh Ve'nirbeh k'dagim.

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that we be fruitful and increase like fish.

Head of a Fish, Lamb, or Lettuce

The head is placed in front of the head of the family, who says:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנִּהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב.

Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha Adonai Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu She Ni-hi-yeh l'rosh ve lo l'zanav.

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors,
that we be like the head (leaders) and not like the tail (followers).

Leeks or Chives (Karti)

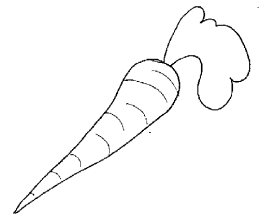
יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּכָּרְתוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׂוֹנְאֵינוּ.

Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha Adonai Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu She Yi-kartu oyveinu v'so-nei-nu.

May it be your will, Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that our enemies and adversaries be cut off.

Carrots (Gezer)

The Yiddish word for carrots is *mehren*, which also means "to increase."



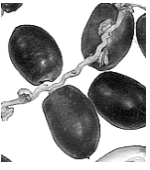
יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּרְבוּ זְכוּיוֹתֵינוּ.

Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha The Eternal Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu She Yirbu Ze-chu-yo-tey-nu.

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that our merits will increase.

Dates (Tamar)

The Hebrew word for date (tamar) sounds like the word “yitamu,” be consumed.



יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּתְמוּ שׂוֹנְאֵינוּ.
*Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha The Eternal Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu She Yitamu So-
nei-nu.*

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that our enemies be consumed.

Beets (Selek)

The Hebrew word for beet is *selek*, which also means "remove".

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁיִּסְתַּלְקוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ.

*Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha The Eternal Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu She'Yistalku O-yvey-
nu.*



May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that our adversaries be removed.

Pomegranate (Rimon)

A pomegranate is full of seeds. It is our hope for the new year that our mitzvot and merits will increase as the seeds of this fruit.



יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁנִּרְבֶּה זְכוּיוֹתֵינוּ כְּרִימוֹן.

*Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha The Eternal Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu
She'Nirbeh Ze-chu-yot Ke'Rimon.*

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors,
that our merits will increase like the seeds of a pomegranate.

Pumpkin (K'ra)

K'ra, the word for pumpkin or gourd, sounds like the word *kara*, which when spelled with “alef” means “proclaimed” and with the letter “ayin” means “tear away.”

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתִּקְרַע רֶעַ גְּזַר דִּינְנוּ וְיִקְרֶוּ לְפָנֶיךָ זְכוּיוֹתֵינוּ.

*Y'hee Ratzon Meelfanecha The Eternal Eloheynu Ve'Elohey Avoteynu
She'Tikra Ro-a G'zar Dineinu va-Yikr'u lifanecha Zechuyoteinu.*

May it be your will, The Eternal our God and God of our ancestors,
to tear away all evil decrees as our merits are proclaimed before you.

