

A Rosh Hashana Seder

adapted by
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I. INTRODUCTION

The original ritual foods for Rosh Hashana are mentioned in the Talmud (*Horayot 12a*) as part of a discussion of omens and the efficacy of symbolic acts:

Abaye taught: Now that you have said that an omen is significant, each person should make it a habit to eat at the beginning of the year, *kara* [gourds, e.g. pumpkins or cucumbers], *rubia* [fenugreek, a seed herb], *karte* [leeks], *silka* [beets] and *tamrey* [dates].

Rabbi Hai Gaon (10th century), reported the custom of reciting a short prayer over each of the above foods which contained a wordplay on the name of the food. While this ritual continued to be practiced mainly by Sephardim, among Ashkenazim the custom arose of eating apples and honey, as an allusion to a sweet year, and of dipping the challah in honey as well, in place of the salt usually used with the challah. In kabbalistic literature, the apple in Songs of Songs (see 2:3 and 7:9) symbolizes both Israel and God. The kabbalists also noted that the Hebrew word for honey (*d'vash*) has the same numerical equivalent — 306 — as the phrase *Av harachamim*, Father of mercy, and thus evokes Divine compassion. The challah and honey ritual is said to derive from the juxtaposition of the images in a verse in a Psalm (81:17) sung by the Levites in the Temple to accompany the Rosh Hashana sacrifice: “*He fed them [Israel] the finest wheat [i.e., the challah]; I sated you with honey from the rock.*”

Added to the tradition was the eating of pomegranates and fish (based on their fecundity, and not on a wordplay), and the head of a sheep, which reminds us of the ram that took Isaac's place in the *akedah*, the binding of Isaac. The statement made while eating the head, “that we be as the head, and not as the tail,” comes from a verse in Deuteronomy (28:13) meaning, may we be strong and not weak. The authorities also allowed heads of other animals to be used.

The foods and prayers associated with this seder have always been reconstructed in light of the vernacular of the community. In Eastern Europe it became customary to eat carrots for Rosh Hashana, because the Yiddish word for carrots, *mehren*, also means “increase.” Similarly, Ukrainian Jews would give their children chicken livers because their Yiddish name, *leberlach*, sounds like *leb ehrlich*, meaning “live honestly.”

We too, continue this chain in our seder today. In our blessings we add *imoteinu* (our mothers). We have also adopted a few unusual food items, which we call “*minhag America*.” These additions are marked by an asterisk(*) to prevent any confusion. We hope you enjoy them.

We wish you a sweet and blessed New Year! *Shanah tovah!*

II. THE SEDER

1. Kiddusha Raba:

Blow the shofar at the moon's renewal,
at the time appointed for our festive day,
for it is a decree for Israel,
a judgment for the God of Jacob.
(Psalm 81:4-5)

תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר
בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְיוֹם חַגֵּנוּ
כִּי חֹק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא
מִשְׁפָּט לֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב

Tik'u vachodesh shofar bekeseh leyom chageinu ki chok leysra'el hu mishpat l'eilohei Ya'akov.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha-gafen.

Blessed is the Eternal One, Source of all, who creates the fruit of the vine.

2. For apple dipped in honey:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָעֵץ.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'etz.

Blessed is the Eternal One, Source of all, who creates the fruit of the tree.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמֹתֵינוּ,
שֶׁתַּחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה

*Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu
she-tehadash aleinu shanah tovah umetukah.*

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

3. For pumpkin, (kara):

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri ha'adamah.

Blessed is the Eternal One, Source of all, who creates the fruit of the earth.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמֹתֵינוּ,
שֶׁיִּקְרַע גְּזֵר דִּינֵינוּ וְקָרְאוּ לְפָנֶיךָ זְכוּיוֹתֵינוּ

*Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu
she-yikra g'zar dineinu, v'yikr'u l'fanecha zechuyoteinu.*

May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors,

that the decree be torn up (*yikra*) and may our merits be proclaimed (*yikr'u*) before you.

4. For fenugreek, (*rubia*), we substitute peas or stringbeans, mentioned as substitutes for *rubia* in Sephardic cookbooks:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאַמְתֵּינוּ,
שְׂיִרְבוּ זְכוּיֹתֵינוּ

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu she-yirbu zechuyoteinu.
May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors,
that our merits increase (*yirbu*).

* We also wish for a year of peace, peace among our families, our communities, and the nations of the world.

5. For leeks, (*karte*):

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאַמְתֵּינוּ,
שְׂיִכְרְתוּ שׁוֹנְאֵינוּ

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu she-kartu son'einu.
May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors,
that our adversaries¹ be cut off (*kartu*).

6. For beets, (*silka*):

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאַמְתֵּינוּ,
שְׂיִסְתַּלְקוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu she-yistalku oyveinu.
May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, that our enemies be removed (*yistalku*).

* And may this be the year that all nations beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

7. For dates, (*tamrey*):

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאַמְתֵּינוּ,
שְׂיִתַּמוּ שׁוֹנְאֵינוּ

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu she-yitamu son'einu.
May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors,
that our adversaries be consumed (*yitamu*).

¹According to *Pri Megadim*, "adversaries" in this context does not refer to external enemies of the Jewish people, but rather to accusing angels created by the commission of sins. Thus this prayer and the others should be seen as asking for Divine help in avoiding the urge to do wrong.

8. For hearts of palm and artichoke hearts*:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמְתֵינוּ,
שֶׁנִּפְתַּח אֶת לִבֵּינוּ

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu shenif-tach et levaveinu
May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, that our hearts be opened.

9. For a pomegranate (found in some versions of the seder):

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמְתֵינוּ,
שֶׁיִּרְבֶּה זְכוּיוֹת כְּרִמּוֹן

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu
sheyirbeh zechuyot kerimon.

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

10. The head of a sheep or fish is customary; we raise a head of lettuce*:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמְתֵינוּ,
שֶׁנְּהִיָּה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב

Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu v'eilohei avoteinu v'imoteinu
she-nih'yeh l'rosh v'lo l'zanav.

May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors that we may be as the head,
and not the tail.

* Each participant adds a prayer as to what he or she hopes God will let us achieve in the
coming year.

11. Ha-motzi, over challah dipped in honey (rather than salt which is customary the rest
of the year):

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed is the Eternal One, Source of all, who brings forth bread from the earth