

סימנא מילתא Rosh Hashana Simanim

Where did all this come from? Important and famous question! The Gemara Kerisus (6a) says: “Abaye said: Now that you have said that a sign (סימנא - *siman*) is a substantial matter, a person should be accustomed to eat, at the start of the year, gourd, fenugreek, leeks, beets, and dates.” Because of this Gemara, it is a custom to eat these listed foods, as well as other foods (raisins and celery to merit having a raise in your salary!), which “represent” good things.

OK – but how does all this make a difference? An even more important question! And many explanations have been given. Here are a few that resonate with me.

- The goal of these *simanim* is to act as a reminder. By eating foods that have positive connotations, a person realizes that now is the time he needs to be asking for these good things, because now is the time he is being judged. As soon as the person realizes that now is the time that he is being judged, he will realize that obviously *simanim* alone will not be enough for a good judgement and that he needs to get his act together! Thus according to this explanation, eating the *simanim*, are a reminder that Aseres Yemei Teshuva is starting.
- By eating these *simanim* and saying the appropriate *Yehi Ratzon* we are showing (Hashem and ourselves) that we realize that it is ONLY Hashem who can ensure we have a sweet year, and that our enemies should be destroyed etc. That itself is proclaiming Hashem as King (the theme of Rosh Hashana) and makes us deserving of His help!
- The *simanim* remind us that everything we do on Rosh Hashana is charged with meaning. If the foods we eat can make a difference, then certainly how we act and speak make a difference! If eating sweet things helps for a sweet year, how much more so acting and speaking sweetly to others will make a difference. And if we are so careful to refrain from bitter foods on Rosh Hashana, that reminds us to refrain from bitter speech as well!

What is the order of the *simnim*? Many have the *minhag* to start with the apple dipped in honey. But this is a bit problematic since some of the other *simanim* are part of the *Shivas Haminim* and should really take precedence. One should ask their Rav and follow their family *minhag*.

When do we say the *Yehi Ratzon*? Some say the *bracha* on the *siman* first, then the *Yehi Ratzon*, and then eat. Others argue that doing so is an interruption, so one should instead say the *bracha*, eat a little of the fruit, and then say the *Yehi Ratzon*. Others hold that one should say the *Yehi Ratzon* before making the *bracha*.

Do I have to eat it? If you do not enjoy it, and certainly if you are worried about bugs, then you can simply look at it and say the *Yehi Ratzon*.

Why specifically an apple? The kabbalists often refer to Gan Eden as *Chakal Tapuchin* - the Holy Apple Orchard and we hope to merit our spot there; Bnei Yisrael are compared to an apple tree that just as its fruits begin to grow before its leaves, so too Bnei Yisrael said “*naaseh*” before “*nishma*” and so too Hashem should fulfill our needs even before we call out to Him; the word תפוח - apple has the same *gematriya* as the words פרו רבו - be fruitful and multiply, and דבש - honey equals אשה - woman. Thus, we are davening that women who need to be blessed with children should be blessed, just as Sarah, Rachel and Chana were on this day.)

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ד' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאַלֵּלֵינוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתְּחַדֵּשׁ עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוֹקָה:

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that You renew for us a good and sweet year.

Dates

The Aramaic word for dates is *tamri* which sounds like *sheyitamu* – be consumed.

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו שיטמו שונאינו ואויבינו.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that our enemies be consumed.

Pomegranates

Since we either do or do not have merits, many explain the request that Hashem
grant us many easy opportunities to earn merits!

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שתרכה זכיותינו כרמון:

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that our merits increase like (the seeds of) a pomegranate.

Fenugreek or Carrots

The Aramaic word fenugreek is *rubia* which sounds like the word *yirbu* to increase.

The Yiddish word for carrots is *merhen* which also translates as increase or more.

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שירבו זכיותינו.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that our merits increase.

Leeks or Cabbage

The Aramaic word leeks or cabbage is *karsi* which sounds like *kares* to be cut off or destroyed.

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שיקרתו שונאינו.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that our enemies be destroyed.

Gourds

The Aramaic word gourd is *kara* which sounds like the word for tearing something up (קרע) as
well as the word to read or proclaim (קרא) – thus we use both meanings.

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שתקרע רוע גזר דיננו, ויקראו לפניך זכיותנו.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that You tear up any bad decrees against us;
and may our merits be proclaimed before You.

Beets

The Aramaic word beets is *silka* which sounds like *siluk* meaning to be removed or eliminated.

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שישלקו אויבינו ומשטינו.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that our enemies be eliminated.

Fish

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שנהיה ונרבה כדגים.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that we will be fruitful and multiply like fish.

Head of a Lamb or Fish

יהי רצון מלפניך ד' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שנהיה לראש ולא לזנב.

Hashem, Who controls everything and Who has taken care of us throughout our history,
may it be Your will that we will be as the head and not as the tail.