HAGGADAH
For Rosh HaShanah Seder
Introduction

There is no doubt that the Jewish New Year—Rosh HaShanah—differs from the New Year that much of the world celebrates on January 1. There is no Rosh HaShanah midnight countdown, and no party hats... but our Jewish New Year is far from a bore! Our sages established Rosh HaShanah traditions that are thought-provoking, creative and, believe it or not, fun—even 1,000+ years after they were written. (How’s that for #ForwardThinking?)

Discover the fascinating history of the Rosh HaShanah Seder: a lesser-known Rosh HaShanah tradition consisting of delicious foods, puns, word games and meaningful reflections on the year that has passed, and expectations for the year to come. We hope that you’ll experience a new—actually, an old!—way to celebrate the Jewish New Year with your family and friends; and if you’re still pining for those party hats, find a creative way to include them in your Seder! The Jewish New Year is at your fingertips.

May the coming year be a peaceful one, filled with blessings.
The Many Names and Meanings of Rosh HaShanah

Usually translated as the Jewish New Year, Rosh HaShanah literally means, the “Head of the Year.” It was not called by this name until Talmudic times, however, and in biblical days it was referred to as *Yom Teruah*—the “Day of the Sounding of the Shofar”—or *Yom HaZikaron*—the “Day of Remembering.” According to rabbinic tradition, Rosh HaShanah has three major significances:

1. It is an anniversary of the world’s creation (and specifically the Sixth Day, when humanity was born)
2. It is the Day of Judgment
3. It is a day of renewing the bond between God and the People of Israel

Rosh HaShanah opens the ten-day period of the Days of Awe (*Yamim Noraim*), which culminate with Yom Kippur. It represents a celebration of the beginning of the New Year, as well as a striving for atonement for our misdeeds in the year that has just ended. The Days of Awe surrounding Rosh HaShanah are days of reflection and judgment, in which we carefully examine who we are so we can become aware of the ways we have failed others, ourselves and God. This introspection is meant to lead us to feelings of regret for the harm we have done, to attempt restitution when possible, and to turn away from our past negative behaviors in order to act differently in the coming year. The blasts of the Shofar (the ram’s horn) awaken our slumbering souls to time’s passage, to our actions and—more importantly—to how we can shape our lives in the future. We are not meant to be our same old selves year after year, but rather we strive to be renewed.

Although Rosh HaShanah consists of very serious and reflective elements, it is also an extremely joyous, festive, forward-looking celebration—and what better way to combine these two moods of the holiday than with food!

### The Rosh HaShanah Seder

Think *Seders* are only for Passover? Think again. In fact, there are a few Jewish holidays with *Seder* traditions, and Rosh HaShanah is one of them.

The gist of the Rosh HaShanah iteration: There is an ancient custom to eat symbolic foods at the Rosh HaShanah meal, accompanied by blessings and wishes for the upcoming year. These foods are consumed in a particular order—a *Seder*.

The tradition of the Rosh HaShanah *Seder* is based on the following early Talmudic source. It appears twice, with a slight variation (in bold):

> Abaye said:
> 
> ‘Now that you have said that an omen is a significant thing, (a person) should always be accustomed *to seeing* / *to eating* at the beginning of the year (on Rosh HaShanah) a gourd, green beans, leek, beets and dates.’
Based on the two different versions of the text (“to see” and “to eat”), two traditions evolved: one in which those present at the Rosh HaShanah meal ate the symbolic foods; the other in which they merely pointed to the foods and recited the corresponding wishes (they did not eat them).

Classical commentators explain that the foods mentioned in the Talmud should be accompanied by wishes/blessings, thereby having the effect of inspiring a person to repent and perform good deeds. They add that one may use any food whose name carries with it the implication of a blessing, even if this is not related to the Hebrew name of the food.

**The Simanim**

As Jewish history developed and the Jews were spread throughout diverse communities around the world, various customs emerged and additional symbolic foods were added, complete with blessings, wishes and hopes. These have become known as the Rosh HaShanah Simanim (the Hebrew word for “symbols” or “signs”).

Some of these wishes are based on the symbolic nature or shape of the food (e.g. honey is sweet, pomegranates have many seeds, etc.); others are word-plays reflecting the food’s name. Originally, these puns were based on the Hebrew or Aramaic names of the foods, but local communities eventually invented new puns based on their local languages and dialects.

The Rosh HaShanah Seder with the foods mentioned in the Talmud (page 5) was preserved mainly among the Jews of Sephardi and Middle Eastern descent; however, Jews from other lands, too, retained the basic concept of serving symbolic foods at the evening meal of Rosh HaShanah.

This year, we hope to gather some of the best of the Rosh HaShanah Seder traditions from around the world, as well as add our own modern twists to this ancient custom. Below, we will explain some of the traditional Simanim (symbolic foods + corresponding blessings), together with newer formulations for wishes and hopes that are relevant to our day.

Thought of your own clever, witty, relevant or generally meaningful food/blessing combo? Tweet it to us (#applesandpony)!
As on other Jewish holidays—and the weekly Shabbat!—the beginning of Rosh HaShanah is marked with candle lighting.

Blessing over the candles:

ברוך אתה ה' אלكورون מלך העולמים אשר קדשנו בהמצותינו ואנו
לדליק נר של (שבת ו) יום טוב.

Transliteration:
Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v') yom tov.

Translation:
Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with commandments, and commanded us to light (Shabbat and) festival candles.

It is also customary to recite the Shehechiyanu blessing when lighting the candles (see page 11 after Kiddush).

Similar to other holidays and to Shabbat, the Rosh HaShanah dinner begins with the Kiddush and the blessing over the wine. While there is a standard blessing over the wine, the Kiddush blessing is unique to Rosh HaShanah. It invokes the themes of remembrance, the blasts of the Shofar and the Kingship of God, thereby distinguishing this holiday from others, and sanctifying it. (The green additions/words in parentheses are only said if Rosh HaShanah falls on Friday night.)

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולמים בורא פרי הסנה:
ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולמים, אשר ברךך בנים כל יום ויהיו כל הימים日々
לושון חסד ובצאותו, ויהיו לו אלהינו בנאותו בכל יום (שנת השבת ואתנוח בראות, ויום לאבד נופי תニー)
הכדורים בז' (שבת ו) לשון אלא בציור(לשתה) מקאר כתב צד 짱יאת מצר, וכּוּנְבַּרְתָם זָכַרְתָם
לושון כל הימים זָכַרְתָם בְּכָל הימים הָאָרֶץ מְקַדְּשׁוּ (ז' השבת ואתינו) יִשְׂרָאֵל ויום הכל.
The Shehechiyanu blessing is a special blessing which we recite on several occasions: when celebrating a holiday for the first time in a yearly cycle; when donning a new garment; and when tasting a new fruit which we have not yet eaten this season.

This blessing thanks God for keeping us alive and well to enjoy this special experience. On Rosh HaShanah, Shehechiyanu is recited during candle lighting and during Kiddush, as well as before blowing the Shofar.

There also is a custom to eat a "new" fruit on the second night of Rosh HaShanah—something you haven't eaten all year, such as an exotic fruit from the green grocer—in order to recite this blessing on the second night of Rosh HaShanah as well. Perhaps the act of seeking out something new can symbolically reflect our deep desire to reinvent ourselves and make ourselves better people in the coming year.

ברוך אַתָּה אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעָלֹם, שֶׁהָעַלְמָנוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיאָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה.

Transliteration:
Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam, borei peri haGafen.

Translation:
Blessed are You, Lord our God, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

 BERKOTZ LEIYAH: A GEMARA IN BAVLI ON THE SHEHECHIYANU BLESSING

The Shehechiyanu blessing is recited on several occasions: when celebrating a holiday for the first time in a yearly cycle; when donning a new garment; and when tasting a new fruit which we have not yet eaten this season.

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Transliteration:
Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam shehechiyanu v’kiyimanu.

Translation:
Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has given us life, and sustained us, and brought us to this day.
Two loaves of Challah bread are blessed and eaten at the Rosh HaShanah meal, just like on other Jewish holidays and on Shabbat. The difference: Tonight’s Challah looks different from all other nights’ Challahs—and contains symbolism! There is a custom to serve round Challah on Rosh HaShanah, representing the circularity of time, the roundness and the fullness of the year, or even a crown (whether it be the crown of God’s kingship or the crowns with which God traditionally adorns the people of Israel). Jews of Polish descent have a custom of making Rosh HaShanah Challah in the shape of ladders (representing the idea that we will be exalted or brought low in the coming year) or birds, based on the verse in Isaiah: “Like the birds that fly, even so will the Lord of Hosts shield Jerusalem, shielding and saving, protecting and rescuing. Then the children of Israel shall return to Him…”

A common custom in many communities is to dip the Challah, normally sprinkled with salt, in sweet honey (or sugar).

When dipping our Challah, we might use this Hassidic wish:

“May God create yeast in your soul, causing you to ferment, and mature, to rise, elevate to your highest possibilities, to reach your highest self.”
It is traditional to begin the Rosh HaShanah Seder with the general blessing over fruit of the trees, before moving through the various Seder foods. Custom recommends that we start with the date, one of the seven species of the Land of Israel.
Fish
A wish for fertility and growth

Karti
A wish for friends and community

Silka
A wish for freedom and growth

Dates
A wish for peace and meaningful relationships

Apple
A wish for a sweet year

Pomegranate
A wish for good deeds

Gezer
A wish for positive judgement

Head
A wish for leadership

Rubia
A wish for prosperity and sharing

Kara
A wish to count our blessings

vegetarian option
Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam borei pri ha’etz.

**Transliteration:**
Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam borei pri ha’etz.

**Translation:**
Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the tree.

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The traditional symbolism of the dates plays on the Hebrew name *Tamar* (date, in Hebrew), which is similar to *Tam*, meaning to end or to extinguish. This *Siman* requests the end of our enemies and those who seek to harm us. Formulated in the positive, it is a request for peace and calm in the year to come.

**A wish for peace and meaningful relationships**

Eating a Rosh HaShanah meal with a roomful of bachelors/bachelorettes? How about an English language twist: Pick up a date and wish everyone a successful year of dating and relationships!

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May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that enmity will end and this new year will bring peace for us and the entire world.

May it be your will, Adonai our God, that this year be full of joyful dates and meaningful relationships.
A wish for good deeds

The pomegranate, which ripens in Israel during the season of Rosh HaShanah, has many sweet seeds inside of it (not to mention some awesome antioxidants). In fact, there is a Midrash that states that there are 613 seeds in the pomegranate, symbolizing the 613 Mitzvot (commandments). Whether or not this number is entirely accurate (feel free to count and see for yourself!), the pomegranate has come to symbolize Mitzvot and good deeds.

Food for Thought: What would you like your life to be filled with this coming year?

A wish for prosperity and sharing

The *Rubia* is one of the symbolic foods mentioned in the Talmud. It is a bean or legume, and usually is interpreted as green string beans. The name is reminiscent of the word *Yirbu*, to increase or to be plentiful. With this Siman, we ask that our merits increase and that we be blessed with plenty. At the same time, the *Rubia* gives us an opportunity to remember and acknowledge those who are less fortunate: for their sakes, we wish that not only will this year be one of prosperity and plenty for us, but also one of giving and sharing with others.

Try the Libyan version of the Siman for prosperity: Rather than *Rubia*, Jews from Libya mix sugar and sesame seeds to symbolize plenty, since the grains are so tiny and numerous that they can’t be counted!

Food for Thought: What would you like your life to be filled with this coming year?
A wish for friends and community

Karti—leeks or scallions—resembles the word Yikartu: “will be cut off.” The traditional wish associated with this food asks that our enemies be cut off, together with those who seek evil. Jews of Persian descent tear the scallions and throw them over their shoulders, sometimes reciting the actual names of the enemies that they wish to destroy. For a more positive rendition, this Siman may be formulated as a request to be blessed with good friends and community.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֶאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁיִּכָּרְתוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׂוֹנְאֵינוּ וְכָל מְבַקְּשֵׁי רָעָתֵנוּ (וְשֶׁנִּתְבָּרֵךְ בִּידִידִים טוֹבִים וּבִקְהִלָּה תּוֹמֶכֶת).

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that those who are against us not succeed, and that we be blessed with true, supportive friends and community.

A wish for freedom and growth

The Aramaic word Salka (beets or beetroot leaf) resembles the word Lehistalek, to retreat. In this blessing, we ask that our enemies retreat and that we be freed from those who wish us harm.

If it’s hard for you to relate to the Aramaic version, try the English: An alternative Siman suggests that we succeed in following our true inner “beat” and path!

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֶאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ (וְשֶׁנִּצְמַח וְנִמְצָא חֵרוּתֵנוּ). May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that all the enemies who might beat us will retreat, and that we will beat a path to freedom.

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that we follow our true inner beat and reach our personal goals.
A wish to count our blessings

The *Kara* is identified as a pumpkin or a gourd. *Kará*, similarly pronounced, means to tear or to rend; with a slightly changed spelling, it also means to proclaim. The traditional blessing associated with the gourd asks that our bad decrees be torn up and our good merits be proclaimed. If we think of merits as blessings, then this Siman effectively reminds us to proclaim and to count our blessings.

**יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֶאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתִּקְרַע רֹעַ גְּזַר דִּינֵנוּ וְיִקָּרְאוּ לְפָנֶיךָ זְכֻיּוֹתֵינוּ (וּבִרְכוֹתֵינוּ).**

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that our bad decrees be torn up and our merits and blessings be proclaimed.

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A wish for positive judgment

The Hebrew word for carrot, *Gezer*, is reminiscent of the infinitive *Ligzor*, meaning both to cut and to decree. Therefore, the carrot on the Rosh HaShanah table traditionally carries with it a wish that God judge us with positive decrees. Eastern European Jewish communities have adapted this as a blessing for plenty, since the Yiddish word for carrots—*Mehren*—can also mean “increase.”

**יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֶאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתִּגְזֹר עָלֵינוּ גְּזֵרוֹת טוֹבוֹת.**

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to decree upon us good decrees and favorable judgment.
A wish for fertility and growth

Some communities serve fish on Rosh HaShanah as a symbol of bounty and fertility. If you’d prefer a vegetarian alternative, try fish crackers or fish-shaped gummy candies! They’ll represent the same themes and blessings for the New Year.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֶאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁנִּפְרֶה וְנִרְבֶּה כְּדָגִים

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that we be fertile and multiply like fish.

A wish for leadership

Many communities serve the head of a fish or a lamb on the Rosh HaShanah Seder table (don’t worry—no one said you had to eat it!). Either of these may represent the wish of being like the head in the New Year, and not the tail—a leader, not a straggler.

The lamb’s head (the brains are removed and cooked) also serves as a reminder of the ram that was sacrificed in the story of the Binding of Isaac, which is the Torah portion that is traditionally read on Rosh HaShanah. Baghdadi Jews stopped using the fish as a Siman because its Hebrew name, Dag, sounds like the Hebrew word for worry: D’agah.

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, ה’ אֱלֹקֵינוּ וֶאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁנִּהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב.

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, that we be like the head and not like the tail.

Vegetarian?

Use a head of lettuce, fish crackers or even a head of beer!
The most well-known of the symbolic Rosh HaShanah foods—the apple dipped in honey—is common in Ashkenazic traditions. The Iraqi custom, for comparison’s sake, is to eat a baked apple with sugar, while in Yemen, quinces were served instead of apples. In all variations, these foods represent the wish for a sweet year to come. The sage the Hafetz Haim reminds us that the sweetness should be reflected in our mood, too: Avoid anger, for it is a bad omen for the coming year; rather, we should be sweet of temperament on Rosh HaShanah.

יהי רצון מלבנו והלבנינו ולאלאינו jabotin, שתחדש שנה שובה ותוחקת.

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to renew us for a good and sweet New Year.

Jews in the Ukraine feed their children chicken livers on Rosh Hashanah because the Yiddish word for livers, Leberlach, is homophonous with Leb Ehrlich, “live honestly.”

Serve a piece of lettuce, half a raisin and a celery stick and put forth the request: “Let us have a raise in our salary!”

When a salad consisting of peas and thyme is placed on the table, say: “May we merit peace in our time!”

Serve salami and bread (lechem), so we may all have salam aleikum (peace unto you) in the year to come!

Offer your guests punch and (bread) rolls, since we’re hoping for a year in which we roll with the punches.

Serve hearts of palm and recite: “May it be Your will that whoever holds our hearts in the palms of their hands, takes good care of them.”

What will you be serving for dinner on Rosh HaShanah night? Just ice and beets—because nothing beats just-ice!
Bring out the condiments! "May we mustard our strength so that we can find the time to 'ketchup' with family and friends and relish all the little moments in life."

Beets and squash: "May we beet and squash the fears and prejudices within us."

"May we cele'rate all the different kinds of JEWS in our mix!" (Mixed fruit juice with celery)

"May we always find fava in Thine eyes." (Fava beans and black eyed pea stew)

"Lettuce say: 'I yam an advocate for peas and justice, and olive the strength to remain true to my values.'"

Pickled figs? Figs and pickles? "May we fig-ure our way out of every pickle."

Gotta love dill! "May we be fair and just in our business dills."

"May we cherish every date and not rush to fig-ure out the solution to every question." (Cherries, dates, figs)

"May we not take our wealth for pomegranate, nor be persimmonious with our charity." (Pomegranate and persimmon fruit salad)

Carob: "This year, may we carabout our fellow man and woman more than ever."

"May we succeed in our fundraisin’ and be always raisin’ our expectations!"

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תחל שנה וברכתיה