

# שמרו ודרשו

(ד"ר א' כ"ח ח')

בענין אכילת סימנים

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ימי הרחמים והסליחות תשס"ו

The Gemara in Horiyos (י"ב ע"א) discusses if any significance can be attributed to signs and symbolisms as foretellers of the future. The Gemara concludes that indeed some degree of accuracy can be ascribed to these Simanim. Although the Torah explicitly prohibits relying on signs and omens, as we are commanded to remain תמים – whole-hearted with Hashem, this is only when one is reliant on these omens as a certain auger of future events and acts upon them accordingly. If one realizes that all events are completely in the hands of Hashem and merely regards these symbolisms as possible indicators for the future, it is permitted<sup>1</sup>. Based on this conclusion, Abaye mentions that one should eat certain foods at the start of the year, that serve as signs of good tidings for the coming year<sup>2</sup>. This Minhag to eat Simanim is mentioned by many Rishonim and brought in Shulchan Aruch as well<sup>3</sup>.

The Gemara and the Shulchan Aruch list the following foods as Simanim: רוביא – fenugreek, כרתית – leek, סילקא – beets, תמרי – dates, קרא – gourds. For each of these foods there is a corresponding יהי רצון that uses the name of the food as either a reference to a good tiding for Klal Yisrael or a bad one for our enemies. The Rama adds that one should also eat pomegranate and other sweet foods<sup>4</sup>. This Minhag to eat sweet foods on Rosh Hashana was already customary in the times of Ezra Hasofer, and is mentioned in Sefer Ezra<sup>5</sup>.

Although most sources mention to eat the Simanim, the Gemara itself only says that one should gaze at these foods on Rosh Hashana and not to necessarily eat them<sup>6</sup>. The Shulchan Aruch does say to eat the Simanim, however, the Poskim mention several practical scenarios where gazing at them is sufficient. For example, if one is worried that there are insects in the fruit that he cannot remove or check for he may simply place the fruit on the table and recite the יהי רצון while gazing at the fruit<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, if one wishes to save the fruit for the next night (in order to use it for שהחיינו), he may also do so<sup>8</sup>.

Another Siman mentioned by the Rama, is to eat an apple dipped in honey, to symbolize the start of a sweet year<sup>9</sup>. The Rishonim explain that the apple represents the "field of apples" mentioned by Yitzchak Avinu in his Bracha to Yaakov, which took place on Rosh Hashana<sup>10</sup>. Other Kabbalistic explanations are offered as well<sup>11</sup>. The apple should be of the sweet variety, and not a sour or tart apple<sup>12</sup>. Some Rishonim mention a custom to use a red apple specifically<sup>13</sup>.

The Poskim discuss at length what Bracha should be said on the apple dipped in honey, since both the apple and the honey have their own individual symbolism and importance. Even though it is eaten after one has made Hamotzi and begun his meal, since the apple does not come as a part of the meal it necessitates its own Bracha<sup>14</sup>. Many Poskim say that the apple is considered primary in this case, and the honey is only secondary. Hence, one would recite פרי העץ בורא פרי on the apple and would not say a Bracha on the honey<sup>15</sup>. (Provided one only eats the honey together with the apple and not separately.) The Yad Efrayim states that since the main purpose of eating the apple with the honey is for its sweet taste, the primary food in this case is the honey. Hence, according to this opinion one would only make a Bracha on the honey and not on the apple when they are eaten together<sup>16</sup>. Others suggest that to avoid this dilemma altogether, one should bake the apple with honey instead of dipping it, so that they are considered one entity and only require one Bracha<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> שו"ת הרשב"א ח"א ס' תי"ג באריכות וכן בשו"ת הרמב"ן שם, דרשות הר"ן סוף דרוש ד' ודרוש י"ב ד"ה ודעת, וב"י שם, ובפיה"מ להרמב"ם פסחים פ"ד מ"י. וע' הג' הגר"א אות י"ג דכל הבאים אחריו חלקו עליו.

<sup>2</sup> הוריות י"ב ע"א, אמר אביי, השתא דאמרת: סימנא מילתא היא, [לעולם] יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא ורוביא, כרתי וסילקא ותמרי.

<sup>3</sup> שו"ע ס' תקפ"ג א'. ע' מהרי"ל הל' ר"ה אות ז', אבודרהם, ערוך ערך קר, מחזור ויטרי עמ' 362, כל בו ס' ס"ד, המנהיג הל' ר"ה אות א'.

<sup>4</sup> רמ"א שם בשם המרדכי.

<sup>5</sup> נחמיה ח, לכו אכלו משמנים ושנתו ממתקים ושלחו מנות לאין נכון לו כי קדוש היום לאדנינו, ע' ראב"ה ח"ב עמ' 331 בשם ר' שר שלום גאון.

<sup>6</sup> יהא רגיל למיחזי, וכן הובא בכמה מהראשונים הנ"ל. וכן מבואר בתשו' הגאונים (אוצה"ג חלק התשובות עמ' 115) "ומביטים בו, ע"ש.

<sup>7</sup> כפ' החיים ס' תקפ"ג סק"ו.

<sup>8</sup> קונ' שיעורי הלכה מהגר"ש פעלדער שליט"א עמ' י"ב.

<sup>9</sup> רמ"א שם בשם אבודרהם.

<sup>10</sup> מהרי"ל הל' ר"ה הובא בד"מ ובט"ז. ובביאור הגר"א הוסיף דזה קרה בר"ה.

<sup>11</sup> ע' בן איש חי פ' נצבים אות ד', ובאמרי נועם ר"ה כ"ח כ' שהיא רמז לדשן המזבח הנקרא תפוח, ובה מזכיר דשן העקידה.

<sup>12</sup> אמת ליעקב ס' תקפ"ג בשם הגר"י קמינצקי זצ"ל. ואם אין לו רק תפוח חמוץ יאכלנו כיון שהדבש ממתיקו, תל תלפיות שנת תרצ"ג הובא במועדים לשמחה עמ' פ"ז.

<sup>13</sup> מחזור ויטרי שם שכן נהגו בצרפת.

<sup>14</sup> מ"ב סק"ג, וע' שם בס' קע"ד ס' ק"ל ענין אם מושך תאות האכילה, וע' ס' שבילי דוד שם סק"ב.

<sup>15</sup> מהרי"ל, ד"מ, מג"א, מהרי" אלאזי ס' מ"ה, יוסף אומץ ס' תתקס"ה, וע' שב"י ח"ב ס' כ"ז.

<sup>16</sup> יד אפרים ס' תקפ"ג.

<sup>17</sup> ס' זכור לאברהם או"ח ח"ג ערך ר'.

Another dilemma posed by the apple occurs when one is also using dates and pomegranates as Simanim. Usually the correct order to eat these three items would be to first eat the dates (one of the Seven Species), then the pomegranate (also one of the seven), and only then the apple<sup>18</sup>. However, many have the Minhag to eat the apple first as it symbolizes the general sweetness of the coming year<sup>19</sup>. Some suggest that in order to avoid this problem, one should not have the dates and pomegranates on the table when he says the Bracha on the apple. If one does so, he should still have in mind to include them in the Bracha on the apple, even though they are not in the room<sup>20</sup>.

The Acharonim discuss when the proper time to say the יהי רצון that is said on the Simanim. The Magen Avraham cites a Machlokes whether one should say the יהי רצון in between the Bracha and eating the Siman, or to say it after eating the Siman<sup>21</sup>. One should not say the יהי רצון before the Bracha, since it is not proper to ask for our needs before thanking and praising Hashem<sup>22</sup>. This was the mistake of Malki Tzedek when he blessed Avraham before blessing Hashem, that caused him to lose the rights to Kehuna<sup>23</sup>. For this reason, some Poskim mention that when drinking "a L'chayim", one should first recite the Bracha on the beverage and only afterwards declare: "L'chayim"<sup>24</sup>. In the same manner, those who are accustomed to saying the Passuk: ה' לישועתך קויתי ה' after one sneezes, should first say this Passuk and then respond תהי ברוך תהי to those who gave him a Bracha<sup>25</sup>.

The Simanim are not limited to the brief list found in Shulchan Aruch. The Poskim say that one may originate any Siman from any fruit whose name has significance in that person's native tongue<sup>26</sup>. The most common example of this is carrots. Since the name for carrots in Yiddish is "Mehren", which can also mean "more" or "many", it is common to eat carrots on Rosh Hashana and recite the יהי רצון that our Z'chuyos should be plentiful<sup>27</sup>. The Taz objects to this practice of creating one's own יהי רצון, since technically any food can be used to hint at either a good thing for us or a bad event for our enemies<sup>28</sup>. The Simanim of the Shulchan Aruch are universal, since the names are based on Lashon Hakodesh<sup>29</sup>.

The Tur mentions that some also eat the head of a sheep or a ram. This serves as a two-fold Siman: firstly to symbolize that Klal Yisrael should become a leader to others and not a "tail". Furthermore it serves as a reminder of the ram brought by Avraham Avinu at the Akeidah<sup>30</sup>. Some Rishonim would eat the ram's head dipped in honey<sup>31</sup>. If one does not have a ram or sheep head, he may use the head of another animal for the first reason<sup>32</sup>. Some Poskim say that the head of a fowl is not sufficient<sup>33</sup>. One should not eat the brain of the animal on Rosh Hashana or year round<sup>34</sup>. Some eat the eyes of the animal or fish as well, and recite a יהי רצון that our eyes should be open to the words of Torah<sup>35</sup>. This Siman is preferable with fish, whose eyes are always open and cannot close<sup>36</sup>. Some eat fish on Rosh Hashana for this reason, as well as to symbolize that we should have many offspring just like fish<sup>37</sup>.

The Tur also mentions a Minhag to eat the lung of an animal on Rosh Hashana. The יהי רצון to say on this is similar to the previous one, since the word for lung is ריאה which is also relayed to the word ראייה - sight<sup>38</sup>. This Minhag is omitted by the Shulchan Aruch and other Poskim, and to the best of my knowledge, lung is not sold commercially in the U.S. due to health concerns.

One additional item also mentioned by the Tur is to eat an Esrog on Rosh Hashana<sup>39</sup>. This Minhag is not found in the Gemara or anywhere else, and some Poskim suggest it is a typographical error<sup>40</sup>. Other Acharonim explain that the source

<sup>18</sup> כמבואר בס' רי"א ס"א וס"ד דכל שיתר קרוב ל"ארץ" בפסוק, קודם. וכ"כ לנהוג בר"ה למעשה במחזור המפורש בשם הגרש"ז אוירבאך, וכ"ה בכה"ח סק"ה, ובלוח א"י מהגר"מ טיקוטינסקי בשם הגר"ח זוננפלד זצ"ל.  
<sup>19</sup> ע' בכה"ח שם סק"ג.  
<sup>20</sup> שם וכמו שמבואר במ"ב ס' רי"א סק"א, וברמ"א שם ס"ה דבכה"ג צריך לכיון בפ"י כיון שלא בירך כסדר, ודלא כבס' ר"ו ס"ה, ואכמ"ל.  
<sup>21</sup> מג"א שם, א"ר, מט"מ ס' תש"צ. וע' א"א בוטשאטש. ויש חולקים ע' חיד"א ביוסף אומץ, תורת חיים סק"ג ובהגהות ברוך טעם על השו"ע שם.  
<sup>22</sup> מגן האלף ע"פ הזהר פ' ויחי, וכן מסיק במ"ב סק"ד.  
<sup>23</sup> נדרים לב ע"ב, ביקש הקב"ה להוציא כהונה משם, שנאמר: +בראשית יד+ והוא כהן לאל עליון, כיון שהקדים ברכת אברהם לברכת המקום הוציאה מאברהם, שנאמר: ויברכהו ויאמר ברוך אברם לאל עליון קונה שמים וארץ, וברוך אל עליון, אמר לו אברהם: וכי מקדימין ברכת עבד לברכת קונו? מיד נתנה לאברהם.  
<sup>24</sup> שכנה"ג או"ח ס' קע"ד הגה"ט אות ב', והובא בשו"ת יחיה דעת ח"א ס' נ"א. וכ"כ במקראי קודש ס' ו'.  
<sup>25</sup> מקראי קודש שם.  
<sup>26</sup> מג"א שם, א"ר ערוה"ש, וקש"ע.  
<sup>27</sup> קצש"ע ס' קכ"ט ס"ט ומשנ"ב סק"א.  
<sup>28</sup> ט"ז בשם האגודה.  
<sup>29</sup> שיעורי תורה (מהגר"ח נאה) ח"א עמ' קצ"ו.  
<sup>30</sup> טור ס' תקפ"ג בשם מהר"ם מרוטנברג.  
<sup>31</sup> כל בו ר"ה ס' ס"ד בשם התשב"ץ, מקו"ח בשם מהר"ל, ב"י בשם הגהות אשר"י.  
<sup>32</sup> קש"ע, מ"ב.  
<sup>33</sup> מקו"ח. ובמועד לכל חי ס' י"ב אות י"ט כ' שנהגו דוקא בראש עוף ע"ש.  
<sup>34</sup> טור ברקת ס' תקפ"ג.  
<sup>35</sup> קצה המטה ס' תקפ"ג ס' ק"א, וע' שו"ת גנזי יוסף ס' קל"ט אות ב'.  
<sup>36</sup> אלף המגן.  
<sup>37</sup> מג"א.  
<sup>38</sup> טור וד"מ בשם הכל בו. וע' ארחות חיים תפילת ר"ה דף צט, וברשב"ץ עמ"ס ר"ה פ' יו"ט.  
<sup>39</sup> שם  
<sup>40</sup> שם

for this Minhag is the same as for the apple, since some translate "the field of apples" referred to by Yitzchak (see above) as Esrogim and not ordinary apples<sup>41</sup>. Others explain that Esrogim were the fruits of the Eitz Hadaas that Adam ate from (which took place on Rosh Hashana). In order to atone for his sin, we eat Esrogim on Rosh Hashana<sup>42</sup>. (This reasoning is contrary to the usual dictum not to use the item used for the sin as part of the atonement, see above paragraph and below.)

Some Rishonim state that the Simanim can be eaten the entire Aseres Ymei Teshuva and not only on Rosh Hashana<sup>43</sup>. Others take the opposite approach and say that only on the first night of Rosh Hashana do the Simanim have significance<sup>44</sup>. Other Poskim say that the second night of Yom Tov is included as well<sup>45</sup>.

Just as certain foods are beneficial to be eaten on Rosh Hashana, certain other foods are preferably avoided. The Rama mentions that some are scrupulous not to eat אגוזים – walnuts on Rosh Hashana. Two reasons are given for this: 1) The Gematria of אגוז is the same as חט(א) – sin. 2) Nuts can cause a person's throat to produce excess phlegm and saliva, which can disturb a person's ability to Daven and listen to the Shofar<sup>46</sup>. One of the main objections to the first reason is that although אגוז is the Gematria of חט, it is also the Gematria of טוב.<sup>47</sup> For this reason many Poskim consider the second reason to be of primary concern<sup>48</sup>. Hence, hazelnuts and other nuts that will have the same effect on one's ability to concentrate should also not be eaten<sup>49</sup>. According to this reasoning, all nuts are permitted after one has finished Davening on the second day. However, many Acharonim cite other symbolic and Kabbalistic reasons not to eat אגוזים aside from the Gematria of the Rama<sup>50</sup>. Hence, in many communities the words of the Rama are not taken lightly, and many refrain from אגוזים even until Hoshana Raba<sup>51</sup>.

Another food mentioned in the name of the Gra as preferably avoided on Rosh Hashana are grapes<sup>52</sup>. Some explain that this is based on the Medrash that the fruit of the Eitz Hadaas were grapes. Since that sin took place on Rosh Hashana, we do not wish to use those fruits on this day<sup>53</sup>. Some say that only red and black grapes are included in this rule, and not green grapes<sup>54</sup>. The Chazon Ish is quoted as once saying that one is permitted to eat grapes on Rosh Hashana since the only reason the Gra didn't eat grapes on Rosh Hashana is because he didn't have any to eat<sup>55</sup>.

The Yaavetz explains that the purpose of eating the Simanim is only in order to reinforce the Tefillah that is said along with them<sup>56</sup>. The Shlah writes that in truth there is little significance to the actual eating of the Simanim. Their entire purpose is to remind a person of his needs, so that he will hopefully do Teshuva and Daven for his needs properly<sup>57</sup>. May all our Tefillos be accepted with compassion.

תכלה שנה וקללותיה, תחל שנה וברכותיה, אכי"ר.

בברכת כתיבה וחתימה טובה,  
מאיר הלוי הלמן

<sup>40</sup>כנה"ג, ומאמר מרדכי.

<sup>41</sup>וכמש"כ התוס' תענית כט: ד"ה של תפוחין, ע"ש.

<sup>42</sup>ראש יוסף ס' תקפ"ג, ורוח חיים לר"ח פאלאגי אות ג'.

<sup>43</sup>לקט יושר ס' קכ"ט בשם התרוה"ד.

<sup>44</sup>בני יששכר חודש תשרי מאמר ב' אות י"א.

<sup>45</sup>שע"ת, א"ר, מחזיק ברכה, מט"א סי"ד כן היא בבא"ח.

<sup>46</sup>רמ"א.

<sup>47</sup>הג"ה על רש"י ישעי' י"א וע' נוהג כצאן יוסף.

<sup>48</sup>יוסף אומץ תתקע"ז, מט"א.

<sup>49</sup>מג"א.

<sup>50</sup>ע' הגה' חת"ס על שו"ע, שו"ת דברי ישראל ח"ב בסוף הספר עמ' ס"ח.

<sup>51</sup>קצה המטה סקט"ז.

<sup>52</sup>מעשה רב.

<sup>53</sup>אמרי שמואל שם בהגהות.

<sup>54</sup>כה"ח אות כ"א וע' מחזור ויטרי הנ"ל.

<sup>55</sup>ארחות רבינו ח"ב עמ' קע"ה.

<sup>56</sup>ס' יעב"ץ.

<sup>57</sup>של"ה מס' ר"ה עמ' הדין, הובא בקיצור במ"ב.