

Having a Seder is not just for Passover anymore....

In fact, it hasn't been
for two thousand years.

LONG AGO the Rabbis appreciated that the center of Jewish life that would replace the Jerusalem Temple was the family table. And while we appreciate how effectively that insight is used on Pesah, how many of us take advantage of the same wisdom on Rosh Hashanah?



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WE ALL KNOW about blowing the Shofar, synagogue services that are longer than usual, and dipping apples in honey. But that is just the beginning.

Since the time of the Talmud, there has been a tradition to conduct a kind of Seder not only on Passover, but on Rosh Hashanah as well. According to the Talmud (Horayot 12a), Abbaye taught that we should eat specific foods at our holiday meal because of their symbolic value and significance as omens for the year ahead. Over time, the list has grown to include carrots, leeks and pomegranates, to name just a few.

THESE OMENS, however, are not simply things we observe in the world around us. They are actually our reenactment of the values and vision that we have for the year ahead. In eating these foods, we declare that life is not just something that happens to us—it is not even a matter to be left only in the hands of God. We eat these foods to stimulate our taste buds, as well as our hearts and our minds, to demonstrate that the year ahead is also in our hands. It is our chance to speak out about our goals for the coming year and consider how we can achieve them.

The foods that comprise this Rosh Hashanah Seder are passed around the table and as they are eaten, a brief prayer is recited that articulates our hopes for the year ahead in ways that are specifically related to the food about to be consumed.

SOMETIMES WE CONNECT our prayer and the new food through a pun—as in the case of carrots, known as *mehren* in Yiddish, which can also mean *to increase*, as we recite the words, “May our merit increase in the coming year.” Other times the pun is from the Aramaic, itself the colloquial Yiddish or English of its day. As the leeks are shared, we ask that “hateful and hurtful people be removed from our lives” as the word for leeks in Aramaic, *karti*, is the same as the word meaning *to remove* in Hebrew.

Then there are the foods that embody the hopes we have for our futures—foods such as the pomegranate. As the fruit is broken open, we consider how we might fill the year ahead with good deeds and positive actions in the same way that the pomegranate is filled with its sweet kernels.

This year, as you share new foods

around the holiday table, ask each other what other foods might be introduced to symbolically extend this tradition of tasting our aspirations. Then continue another ancient custom by asking each other what real steps each of us is willing to take to make our holiday hopes into yearlong realities.



*Tell me what you eat,
and I will tell you
what you are.*

ANTHELME BRILLAT-SAVARIN

The Physiology of Taste, 1825
French gourmet & lawyer
(1755 - 1826)

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