

Q & A REGARDING SIMANIM

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

In # 38, we discussed the various "Simanim," or foods that we eat on Rosh HaShana, and the "Yehi Ratzon" that we recite with each of them. As mentioned, there are varying customs as to which foods are eaten. Ezra Levy wrote in that the customs of the Sefardic communities vary on the foods used. He gave some examples from his own experience and knowledge. The custom among the Sefardic Jews of Egypt for the food "Rubia" was black-eyed peas because the Arabic term for the word was "Lubia," pronounce liked "Rubia." Their custom for the food "Silka" was cooked spinach, because the Arabic term for the word was "Salk." Also, in Ezra Levy's family, the custom was to dip the apple in sugar.

Marcel Barenblut asked a question that I am sure was on the mind of a few readers: What exactly is "fenugreek" - the food known in the language of the Gemora as "Rubia?"

Fenugreek, according to the Artscroll Rosh HaShana Machzor, is an herb, indigenous to western Asia, whose seeds are used in cookery and medicine. A look in my Webster's dictionary yielded a similar definition.

Kalman Staiman posed an interesting question. If one would look in Shulchan Aruch Orech Chayim 211, one would find that there are different opinions as how one should conduct himself in the following scenario: A person has an orange and a fig in front of him, and he plans on eating both. Which one of these fruits should he make the blessing on? One opinion is that since the fig is one of the seven species of "fruits" associated with the land of Israel, it is more important than other fruits. Therefore, when presented with a choice of making a blessing on one of two fruits, one should chose the fruit which is one of the "seven species." That being the case, the question is that I wrote in # 38 that one should make the blessing over the apple, and then say the Yehi Ratzon. If one is also going to eat a pomegranate or a date, and all the fruits are before the person (which are both of the Seven Species), should not one make the blessing on the pomegranate or a date rather than the apple?

Rabbi Dovid Feinstein shlit"a answered that if one has the fruits before him and has to chose which one to make the blessing on, one should indeed make the blessing on the fruit from the Seven Species instead of the apple.

Sherry Fryman inquired about a practice that we have on the second night of Rosh HaShana. It states in Shulchan Aruch Orech Chayim 600: 2 that "By Kiddush on the second night of Rosh

HaShana one should wear a new garment or have in front of him a new fruit, and say the blessing of 'She'hechyanu.' If a new garment or new fruit can not be found, one should say the blessing nevertheless." (This applies as well, according to many opinions, to when a woman lights candles on the second night of Rosh HaShana.) The Mishna B'rura explains that the reason for this practice stems from the fact that there is a disagreement as whether the blessing of She'hechyanu should be said on the second night of Rosh HaShana. One opinion is that we do say it on the second night, as we do on the second festival night with every other holiday (in the Diaspora). The other opinion is that since Rosh HaShana consists of two days (one period) of holiness, and we already said the blessing on the first night, there is no need to say it on the second night. In order to say the blessing, yet not demonstrate that we are not following the second opinion, we have a new fruit or new garment present. Upon wearing a new garment or eating a new fruit, one makes the blessing of She'hechyanu. By necessitating a blessing of She'hechyanu, we can make the blessing and still fulfill both opinions in the argument.

The problem that arises is what is a "new" fruit? In Shulchan Aruch Orech Chayim 225, we find that one should make the blessing of She'hechyanu upon seeing a new fruit. The "newness" of the fruit is defined by the season of the fruit: each fruit has its season during the year. The first time one sees (and eats) the fruit at the beginning of the season, one should make the blessing. (For exact application of the Halacha, please ask your Rabbi, as what is stated here is only illustrative of the law, and by no means is the final word on the matter. - YP) A problem that we are faced with nowadays is that because of importing, many fruits are now "in season" (so to speak) and available year round, and therefore it is hard to find a "new" fruit. One suggestion is to wear a new garment. Suggestions for "new fruits" I would imagine really depend on where in the world you live. I know that when I lived in Chicago, and now in New York, starfruits, and fresh (not dried) dates and figs are somewhat hard to come by during the rest of the year, and therefore could qualify as new fruits. For more suggestions, one can consult their local Rabbi (or maybe their local green grocer!).