

# OF FASHIONS AND FOODS

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Rosh Hashanah is the day on which the world is judged for the coming year. Understandably, this holiday carries with it seriousness not found by the other holidays. The Talmud (Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah 1:3) writes that even though our judgement day is one of solemnity, on Rosh Hashanah, we have a custom to wear white clothing and to prepare hearty, festive meals as on all other holidays. In this way, we differentiate ourselves from others who find themselves in judgement, with their fates in the balance. "Normally," the Talmud says, "when a person is being judged, they wear black clothing, they appear unkempt, as their sole concern is their fate: will the decision be favorable? However, the nation of Israel on Rosh Hashanah is different. They wear white clothes, they are finely groomed, and they feast and drink and rejoice. Why? Because they know that Hashem can perform wonders for them."

Our choice of foods and clothing on Rosh Hashanah are therefore significant, carry with them deep meanings and are full of symbolism.

The Talmud, while describing the abnormally festive mood on Rosh Hashanah, mentions specifically that the clothing worn should be white. If the point of our dress is to illustrate a festive mood, then why should we wear specifically white, as opposed to fine colored clothing? The Ba"ch, in his glosses on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) writes that if one wore colored clothing, it might appear that the individual has absolutely no fear or worry on this judgement day. However, by wearing fine white clothes, one illustrates that he acknowledges what could be his end - death. The white clothing is reminiscent of the traditional burial shroud, and therefore serves as a reminder of the fear one must have while simultaneously being confident of G-d's mercy. In addition, white symbolizes the purity that exists after sins have been forgiven. White is also representative of angels, who are of utmost purity, without flaw, blemish or sin. For these reasons, specifically white clothing is mentioned.

Nowadays, this custom is seen in the wearing of the Kittel, a white robe. Many have a custom to only wear the Kittel on Yom Kippur. The only ones, according to this custom, to wear the Kittel on Rosh Hashanah are those that lead the congregation in prayer and blowing the shofar. Nevertheless, just the sight of those individuals wearing the Kittel on Rosh Hashanah should remind us of the lesson the Talmud says it should impart.

The food we eat teaches us as well. Besides the Omens that are traditionally eaten (see 1:38), there

are other food-related customs. Starting with the holiday of Rosh Hashana and throughout the High Holiday season, there is a custom amongst many Jews regarding the shape of the Challah loaves. Usually these loaves used during a Shabbos or holiday meal are long and braided. However, during this time of the year, there is a tradition to use round Challos. A number of reasons are given for this custom.

A round object has no beginning and no end, no starting or ending point. It is fitting to have such an object on our tables during the time in which we are being judged for the coming year. It is symbolic of our desire for a long, continuous life, full of continuous blessing. For this reason, we have a circular Challah, to signify the perpetuity of blessings we desire for the coming year.

Another reason comes from an explanation of why matzos, eaten on Pesach, were traditionally made round. When the Jews were in Egypt, they were exposed to the polytheism of the Egyptians. This form of worship was contrary to the nation of Israel's strict adherence to the worship of the One and Only G-d. The nation was faced with constant reminders of their masters' form of worship, even down to the shape of the bread. The bread was multi cornered, to signify the various gods the Egyptians worshipped. In order to distance themselves from the customs and practices of the Egyptians, the nation of Israel intentionally made their bread round. The circular shape, signifying a never-ending unity, represented G-d. On Rosh Hashanah, we herald the rule of the ultimate monarch, of Hashem our G-d. On this day, we affirm our belief in the One and Only King. It is therefore fitting to have a reminder of this essential, this pillar of our faith, before us on Rosh Hashanah and until our judgement period is concluded on Hoshanna Rabbah.

In line with this reasoning, there are those who say that the round shape is symbolic of another facet of royalty. In the prayers on the High Holidays, we say "And we give to You a royal crown." The round shape of the Challah represents the crown, the sign of G-d's royalty, the subject of many of our prayers on Rosh Hashanah.

So many lessons to be learned, and so little time!

K'siva V'chasima Tova, May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year!