



Gratz Insider, September 2016 - Story Continuation

[To return to the newsletter, close this page.]

The Gratz Gourmet

Dina's family celebration of Rosh Hashanah includes the *Seder Yehi Ratzon*, a tradition originating in Sephardic and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern and North African) communities, which has since spread throughout the Jewish world. Unlike its lengthier Passover counterpart, this seder is a much shorter tradition, which adds some extra lighthearted fun to the Rosh Hashanah meal. [As explained by writer Rahel Musleah](#), the word *seder*, meaning order, is used simply because foods are eaten in a prescribed order, but this order may differ slightly from community to community.ⁱ

The special foods that comprise the *Seder Yehi Ratzon* represent aspirations for the New Year and are associated with blessings containing puns. For example, in the blessing for the ram's head (or fish head), which on modern-day Rosh Hashanah tables is often replaced by a head of lettuce or cabbage, we ask God "that we be the heads and not the tails - the leaders and not the followers." The real fun begins when family members get witty and create their own puns.

Dina explains that the whole notion of eating special foods with symbolic meaning on Rosh Hashanah began almost two thousand years ago in Babylonia with the Talmudic scholar Rabbi Abaye. As a symbol of prosperity, Rabbi Abaye recommended that we eat foods that grow abundantly. On his list were pumpkin, long beans, leeks, beets and dates. Apples, pomegranates and the ram's head were added later.

While the foods selected by Rabbi Abaye are stated in the Talmud, we cannot, according to Dina, pinpoint the origin of the pun-laden blessings recited during the *Seder Yehi Ratzon*. Although the seder is positive in nature, some of the blessings are negative in tone, calling for things like the annihilation of our enemies. As a result, some, including Dina, choose to offer a more positive and contemporary spin in their English interpretations of the blessings. Dina even manages to cleverly transfer word plays into English, even though the *Yehi Ratzon* puns are in Hebrew.ⁱⁱ

Believing strongly in "bringing fun and joy into the practice of Judaism," Dina also encourages families to create their own Rosh Hashanah puns - in any language. For example, an apple turnover has become a staple on her Rosh Hashanah table, signifying the wish to turn over a new leaf in the New Year. Another clever *Yehi Ratzon* pun that Dina has heard is "May we have a raise in salary," with the corresponding symbolic food being celery topped with nut butter and raisins.

[Other creative possibilities](#) come from the Jewish scholar Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, who has suggested peaches for a peachy year or Brussel sprouts, with the associated wish: "May our good fortune 'sprout'!" Noam Zion, director of the Shalom Hartman Center's Resource Center for Jewish Continuity, has joined in the fun with a few puns of his own:

Dates: "May it be G-d's will that all my single friends have many dates this year."

Tomatoes or hot peppers: “May it be G-d’s will that this be a red-hot New Year.”

Dina considers the creation of original Rosh Hashanah puns as being “totally in the spirit of the tradition.” She adds that this custom “makes the Rosh Hashanah dinner more lively and more engaging, especially for the kids.”

Hoping that in the New Year, we all have lives “as full of good deeds as the pomegranate is full of seeds,” Dina offers the recipe below for pomegranate glaze.

Pomegranate Glaze

2 ½ cups pomegranate juice (possible substitutions: cranberry, cranberry-raspberry or cranberry-pomegranate juice)

½ cup orange juice concentrate

1 cinnamon stick

3 tablespoons honey, brown sugar or Splenda to taste

3 tablespoons orange juice concentrate

Fresh pomegranate seeds to garnish

1. Place the juice, sweetener and cinnamon stick in a small pan and cook over low heat until the sauce thickens and coats the back of a spoon. The sauce should be sweet with just a hint of tartness.
2. Remove the cinnamon stick. Reduce the heat and keep warm until serving.
3. Set at least half of the sauce aside and brush the remaining sauce over roasting chicken or duck during the last few minutes of roasting.
4. Garnish the chicken or duck with fresh pomegranate seeds and serve with remaining sauce.

ⁱ Rahel Musleah is a Jewish author and journalist born in India, who has worked hard to bring the *Seder Yehi Ratzon* ritual to a wider audience. Her book [Apples and Pomegranates: A Family Seder for Rosh Hashanah](#) has been [described](#) as “much like a modern day Passover *haggadah*.”

ⁱⁱ For those interested in conducting their own *Seder Yehi Ratzon*, below is the list of traditional foods and their respective Hebrew blessings, along with Dina’s English interpretations and her explanations of the Hebrew puns. Dina encourages personalizing the experience with original puns too.

DATES

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ (וְאִמּוֹתֵנוּ) שְׁיִתְמוּ אוֹיְבֵינוּ וְשׂוֹנְאֵנוּ וְכָל מִבְּקָשֵׁי רְעֵתָנוּ.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that this DATE will bring an end to all hatred.

Word Play: The Hebrew word יִתְמוּ means “to end,” and sounds a lot like the word תָּמָר meaning “date.”

POMEGRANATE

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ (וְאִמּוֹתֵנוּ) שְׁנִתְּנֵה מִלְאִים מְצוֹת כְּרָמוֹךְ.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that we be as full of good deeds as the pomegranate is full of seeds.

APPLES AND HONEY

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו (ואמותינו) שתחדש עלינו שנה טובה ומתוקה כדבש
מראשית השנה ועד אחרית השנה.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), to renew us for a good and sweet year—as sweet as honey from the beginning of the year to its end.

PUMPKIN (or SQUASH)

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו (ואמותינו) שתקרע רע גזר דגנו.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that all evil decrees against us be torn up and SQUASHED.

Word Play: The Hebrew word קרע means “to tear up.” It sounds a lot like קרא which is the Hebrew word for “pumpkin.”

LONG BEANS

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו (ואמותינו) שירבו זכותינו.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that our merits increase to more than they have BEEN.

Word Play: The Hebrew word ירבו means “to increase.” It sounds a lot like רובץ which is the Hebrew word for “long beans.”

BEETS

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו (ואמותינו) שישתלקו אויבינו ושונאינו וכל מבקשי רעתנו.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that all our enemies and those who wish us ill will BEAT a hasty retreat while we BEAT a path to freedom.

Word Play: The Hebrew word ישתלקו means “to beat a hasty retreat” or “run away.” It sounds a lot like סלק which is the Hebrew word for “beets.”

LEEKES

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו (ואמותינו) שיפירתו אויבינו ושונאינו וכל מבקשי רעתנו.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that all our enemies and those who wish us ill will be cut off so that their evil wishes LEAK away.

Word Play: The Hebrew word יִכָּרְתוּ means “to be cut off.” It sounds a lot like כִּרְתִּי which is the Hebrew word for “leeks.”

RAM'S HEAD

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵנוּ (וְאִמּוֹתֵנוּ) שְׂנֵהֲבֵה לְרֹאשׁ וְלֹא לְזָנָב.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our fathers (and our mothers), that we be the HEADS and not the tails—the leaders and not the followers.