

Judaism knows the secret to happiness. It is to imbue everything with significance and meaning. During the Rosh Hashanah evening meals, we employ various customs aimed to get us into the proper frame of mind. Among the customs is the series of the *simanim*, literally signs or symbols. These are the foods that we bring to the table at the beginning of the evening meal to express our hopes for our upcoming year

So you may ask: “how does eating an apple dipped in honey guarantee us a sweet new year?” The Talmud and its commentators point to the linguistic significance of their names, which are essentially wordplays on the positive ideas they represent. Jews throughout the ages have always added to the list of *simanim*. In fact, any food which sounds like the word for ‘abundance’ in any language may be used. For this reason, many individuals eat carrots since the Yiddish word for carrot is *mehren*, which is similar to the word *mehr* or ‘more’. Some of them are even quite witty. Several years ago, Rav Heinemann introduced a now famous Baltimore *siman* to take lettuce, half a raisin and celery as an indication to ‘let-us-have-a-raise-in-salary’.

Humour aside, how can we suggest that eating certain foods can influence our fortunes in the coming year? Are we invoking a kind of magic or spell? In reality, *simanim* probably do not have intrinsic powers or benefits. The purpose of *them* is to simply awaken our hearts and direct us to, literally, internalize our goals, hopes and dreams for the new year. We don't just say "have a sweet year," we taste a sweet year. We want a sensory experience of sweetness to help us focus. We eat the apple to awaken our hearts, to internalize and actualize our goals for the new year and start us on the proper path.

Rosh Hashanah is the time to recalibrate our personal GPS and reset it to where we should want to be heading. It is a job that encompasses the whole day, from the prayers we say and the actions we do to even the food that we eat. And if we can refocus and reflect on our hopes and dreams, even during the time when we are satiating our own physical needs, then we have taken one step forward on the way to becoming the person we aim to be and there is nothing sweeter than that.

Shana Tova and G'mar Chatima Tova from the King David family.