

The Rosh HaShanah Seder *Sephardic Traditions for the New Year*

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In Sephardic Jewish homes there are several ways to prepare and conduct the Rosh HaShanah seder. These traditional foods and blessings represent a combination of my family's Sephardic traditions from Italy, Gibraltar and Morocco.

The Rosh Hashanah Seder offers an array of symbolic foods that symbolize our hopes and dreams for the new year. The seder is called "Seder Yehi Ratzon" The Seder of G-d's will ... we offer blessings and pray that it will be G-d's will that we are blessed with bounty, strength and peace in the coming year.

The Rosh HaShanah seder has its origins in the Talmud (Horayot 12a) where Rabbi Abaye writes about eating those foods that grow in abundance at this time of the year. We serve this abundance at our seder table as a symbol of prosperity.

To conduct the seder, you'll need seven bowls arranged, like a seder plate, and place them in the center of the table. Each bowl is filled with one of the following:

Dates
Pomegranates
Apples and Honey
String Beans
Pumpkin
Spinach and Scallions
Fish Head/ Sheep's Head (or Head of Lettuce)





The leader begins the seder by chanting the following:

Leader: “Seder Yehi Ratzon”

The Group Responds: “Seder Yehi Ratzon ... Baruch HaShem.”

Dates (Tamarim) Pass around the bowl and have each person take one date

Leader: “May It be your will, G-d, that all fighting will end. May we date this New Year with Peace and Happiness.”

The Group Responds: “Ken Yehi Ratzon” (all take a bite)

Leader: Baruch atah Adonai, elohenu melech ah-olam, borei p're ha-etz. Blessed are you, Adonai, Ruler of the universe who has created the fruit of the tree.”

Pomegranate (Rimon) Note: It's best if you prepare a pomegranate by peeling it and placing all the seeds in a bowl. If you can't find a pomegranate, a fig is a fine substitute. The point here is to have a fruit that is filled with seeds. It is said that the pomegranate was chosen for the Rosh HaShanah seder because it has 613 seeds... representing all the mitzvot. Pass the bowl around and have each person take a piece of pomegranate or one fig.

Leader: May it be your will, G-d, that in this new year we keep your commandments.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon” (all take a bite)





Apples and honey (Tapuah ba-d'vash)

In advance cut the apples and have honey ready for dipping. Pass around and have each person hold an apple slice dip and say:

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, to renew for us a year that is as good and sweet as honey.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon (eat the apples)

Sing: “Apples and Honey for Rosh HaShanah”

String Beans (Rubia o Lubia , in Italian “Fagiolino”)

Note: Rubia or Lubia are available in Chinese and Indian grocery stores. String beans are a fine substitute as are snow peas because all of these have many seeds. Boil the string beans or snow peas or you can serve them raw. Pass around the beans and say:

Leader: May it be your will, G-d, that we increase our merits.”

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Leader: Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p’ri ha –adamah. Blessed are you, Adonai, ruler of the universe, who has created the fruit of the earth.”

Pumpkin or Gourd (K’ra)

Prepare these by boiling, mashing and sweetening with brown sugar and honey. Or use a can of pumpkin pie filling. Pass it around and say:

Leader: As we eat this pumpkin, may it be Your will, G-d , to guard us. Tear away all evil decrees against us and remember the good things we have done in the past and will do in the new year.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon





Spinach or Beetroot Leaves (Selek)

Boil the greens and have them ready in a bowl. Pass them around, each person taking a leaf.

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, to banish all the enemies who might beat us.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Leeks or Scallions (Karti)

These may be sliced and served raw. Pass these around the table.

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, that “mazel” good fortune find us in the year to come.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Fish Head/ Sheep’s Head/Head of Lettuce

Pass the head around with each person taking a piece.

Leader: May it be Your will, G-d, that we be heads, not tails. Leaders, not followers, never stragglers but at the head of what is right and what is good in the year to come.

The Group: Ken Yehi Ratzon

Sing: “Hi Ne Ma Tov”

With thanks to Rabel Musleah whose Sephardic Indian traditions form the basis of this seder.

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