



ROSH HASHANNAH

DEPTH OF THE SIMANIM

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION

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Depth of the Simanim Of Rosh HaShanah¹

Introduction

With *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance) we will speak a bit about the day of *Rosh HaShanah*.

The *Gemara*² states, “One should be accustomed to eat in the beginning of the year [*Rosh HaShanah*] *kara* (gourd), *rubya*, *kartis*, *silka* and *tamri* (dates). The *Tur*³ cites additional foods, but in the actual words of the *Gemara* in front of us, it is these five foods that are mentioned.

The *Gemara* elsewhere⁴ does not say that one should eat these foods, but instead to look at them. So there are two differing opinions in the *Gemara*: if we need to eat these foods on Rosh Hashanah, or if we should look at them.

First we will define what the concept of *simanim* is, and then we will go through the particular *simanim* that we eat, in-depth.

Simanim: Revealing The Hidden Essence of Something

A *siman* is a symbol to the essence of something. When something isn't openly revealed to our eyes, it needs a *siman* so that we can know it exists. The *siman* of something is how we can become aware that the something exists; it draws the Heavenly essence behind the matter onto This World so that we can see it.

The *Acharonim* (later scholars) dispute about what the tefillos are that we say by the *simanim*. The *Avudraham* understands that the prayers we say before we eat the *simanim* are a prayer to merit a good judgment, while the *Chochmas Shlomo* is of the opinion that it is not a tefillah, rather, because we have bitachon (faith) that we will merit a good judgment. Either way, the *simanim* represent something that we cannot see here on this world, and we can draw down their Heavenly essence to this world through the *simanim*.

This concept, that a concept is hidden from our view but we can still draw it down from Heaven, is really the concept behind death. We will explain.

Rosh Hashanah is about both life and death, for the “book of the living” and the “book of the dead” are open on Rosh Hashanah. Had Adam eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, there would be only life, but when Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, death came to the world. He connected himself to

¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/rosh-hashannah-060-depth-simanim>

² *Kereisos 6a*

³ *Tur Orach Chaim: 583: 1*

⁴ *Horayos 12a*

death ever since then. In other words, the real life is hidden from us in our current state, so we do not have the essence of life in our current state. But we have a *siman* that can awaken to us what the essence of life is.

Siman is from the word *sam*, poison. When *simanim* are used for a holy purpose, there is *simana milsa hi*, “A *siman* is regarded”. When the evil of the *sam* in the *siman* is removed, through using it as a *siman*, the evil of *siman\sam* becomes rectified; it becomes “*simana milsa hi*.”

Siman As A Means For Finding A Lost Object

Until now we explained one use of a *siman*, which is when something is hidden and we need some way of reminding ourselves that a concept exists.

But there is also a kind of *siman* because it has become lost and the *siman* can help us find it again, because a lost object is recognizable if it has a *siman* on it. What is the deeper meaning behind this kind of *siman*?

The *simanim* on *Rosh HaShanah* are either eaten or they are seen, as we brought earlier. Chavah saw the *Eitz HaDaas* and she ate from it. Thus, eating or seeing the *simanim* of *Rosh HaShanah* is what rectifies the sin of Chavah when she saw and then ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*. There were two parts to the sin – seeing the *Eitz HaDaas*, and eating of it.

Rashi says that some of the foods we eat on *Rosh HaShanah* are foods that grow quickly and some are foods that are sweet [because they grow slowly]. Why do we eat foods that grow quickly? The simple understanding is that it symbolizes how we should merit to quickly grow in our spirituality. This is understandable according to the opinion that the *simanim* are tefillos, we eat them to get the merits and thus increase our spiritual level.

However, according to the other opinion that the *simanim* are an expression of our *bitachon*, why do we eat foods that grow quickly?

The *Eitz HaDaas* was an unripe fruit. The way this is rectified is by eating fruit on *Rosh Hashanah* that grows quickly, which is reminiscent of the unripe fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas*.

Chazal state that in the future, women will give birth the day they conceive. The depth of this is because it will rectify the first evil of eating fruit that grew quickly and was unripe; by the *Eitz HaDaas*, it was an evil kind of quick growth, thus it was unripe. In the future, when women give birth right away, there will be quick growth, but it will be ripe results.

Elevating The Mundane

There is a deeper meaning as well to why we eat foods on *Rosh HaShanah* that grow quickly.

The above-quoted *Gemara* says to eat *rubya*, and Rashi⁵ translates this as “*tiltan*.” Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt”l was asked that the *Gemara* mentions elsewhere that *tiltan* is a kind of animal food; if so, how could it be that on *Rosh HaShanah* we should eat animal food? Isn’t this a bad *siman*?

First we need to define what it is, and then we can understand.

The *simanim* we eat on *Rosh Hashanah* are not just because of their Heavenly essence that they represent. It is more than that – it is to take something mundane and reveal how they are spiritual. So when we eat *rubya*, which is animal food, a mundane kind of food, that is precisely how we sanctify animal food - by using it for a spiritual purpose.

Why Kara and Rubya Are Eaten Together

Based upon the above, now we can also understand the depth of why we eat *kara*.

Rashi says that *kara* is called *dalaas* (gourd). This is mainly food fit for human consumption, but the Mishna elsewhere says the animals also eat *dalaas*.⁶ Thus, *rubya* represents how we sanctify animal food; how do we sanctify it? We sanctify it by eating *dalaas*, which raises it from the level of animal food to human food. *Rubya\tiltan* is mainly animal food; through eating *kara\dalaas* and *rubya* together, we raise animal food to the level of human food.

Beinonim: Going From The Level of Servant To The Level of Son

Avraham told Eliezer, “*Stay here with the donkey*”, and *Chazal* expound to this to mean that he was telling him, “You are a nation that is like a donkey”. In other words, Eliezer was his slave, and a slave lowers himself from the level of a human to an animal.

On *Rosh HaShanah* we say, “*Whether we are like children, whether we are like servants, have mercy on us.*” These are two sides to the coin – either we are a son, or we are a servant. For every two sides, there is always a middle point that connects them, so there are really three groups of people. On one side there are the *tzaddikim*, who are like children to Hashem. There are the wicked on the other side, who are like servants to Hashem. The middle group is the *beinonim*, who are on the level between *tzaddikim* and the wicked.

Beinoni has the same numerical value in Hebrew as 128; when the words *ben* and *eved* are added together, it also adds up to 128. The *beinoni* is between the *ben* and the *eved*. An *eved* goes out to

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *End of Tractate Shabbos*

freedom either when his tooth or eye is removed. A person eats with his tooth and sees with his eye – the depth of this, is that a person goes out of exile when he rectifies his eating and his vision.

Thus, a person either sees or eats the *simanim* on *Rosh HaShanah*, so that he can leave the level of *eved* and go to the level of *ben*. An *eved* goes out through either tooth or eye; therefore a person should eat the *simanim* because that is how he goes free with his tooth, and he should see them so that he can go free through his eye.

But there is a deeper understanding a well.

When *eved* and *ben* is combined, it is 128, which is also the value of *beinoni*. If *beinoni* is added to both *eved* and *ben*, it is 128 and 128, which equals 256, equal to the numerical value of Aharon. Aharon loved peace and pursued peace and thereby brought people closer to the Torah; his whole essence was to serve as the intermediary and attach the wicked to the righteous. He brought together husband and wife, and he brought together one to another. Aharon is the one who connects that which has been separated – he represents a *beinoni*, the connecting point between the righteous and the wicked; a *beinoni* connects the levels of *ben* and *eved* together.

Kara\Dalaas: Either A Deadly Poison or Life-Giving

Kara is *dalaas*, which can be rearranged as the word *la-daa*s, to know – a hint to the root of the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, for there was a desire to know of the *Eitz HaDaas*. It can also be read *dal es*, to take away time – because as a result of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, death came to the world; the time of man's life was cut short.

The *Gemara*⁷ lists a few kinds of *dalaas*. What kind of *dalaas* do we eat on Rosh Hashanah? The *Gemara*⁸ describes *dalaas yevonis*, “Greek *dalaas*”, which is called a prominent kind of *dalaas*. The *Gemara* elsewhere describes a kind of *dalaas* that is used for vinegar, and this represents a kind of *dalaas* that is destroyed so that it can be used for something else; this is the lowest use of *dalaas*. There is regular *dalaas*, there is Greek *dalaas*, which is prominent *dalaas*, and there is unimportant *dalaas*.

Thus, the *Avodah* of eating *dalaas* is to take ordinary *dalaas* on *Rosh HaShanah* and elevate it to the level of prominent *dalaas*.

The *Gemara*⁹ says that *kara* was once brought into one the Sages' homes, and the Sage said, “Remove the angel of death from this house!” The *Gemara* explains that *dalaas* can sometimes harm an ill person or heal him. Another opinion in the *Gemara* is that it depends how the *dalaas* is eaten; if it is eaten by itself, it is deadly to an ill person, but if it is eaten as together with other herbs, then it heals. From here we see that *dalaas* can be deadly poison.

⁷ In Tractate Nedarim

⁸ Beitzah 3a

⁹ Nedarim 49a

The way we elevate *dalaas* on *Rosh HaShanah* is to go from *eved* to *ben*. On *Rosh HaShanah* we declare *Malchiyos*; we elevate *eved* to *ben*. *Dalaas* symbolizes how we must elevate our level, to declare Hashem as King over us.

Rosh HaShanah is from the word *rosh*, the head. *Dalaas* is to elevate; we elevate ourselves to declare the King. The highest point of the king is the crown, which is on the head. So too, in time, the *malchus* (kingship) in time is by the head of time, which is *Rosh HaShanah*.

The *Gemara*¹⁰ discusses an animal whose head was severed, and it was given surgery and lived after that. What did they do to it? Rashi says that they chopped dry *dalaas* and used it to glue the animal's head back to the body. Usually the rule of the *Gemara* is that "a *treifah* (dying animal) cannot live," but this animal was an exception to the rule; it became a *treifah* and lived afterwards, when they glued its head back together, through *dalaas*. So *dalaas* can connect something that was previously dead back to the head, where it then can be alive.

We find this idea illustrated by a statement of Reb Pinchos Koritzer zt"l, that a person should be cautious not to think any evil thoughts on *Rosh HaShanah*, because those thoughts will carry over into the rest of the year, being that *Rosh HaShanah* is the head of the year, and the head drags everything else with it.

The Beinoni By Neilah Can Open Up A New Gate

Rosh HaShanah is when we are all written in either the book of life or the book of death, depending on if we are righteous or wicked. A *beinoni*, who is the connecting point between the righteous and the wicked, can be elevated to the level of the righteous, but he can also uplift the wicked with him.

The time of *Neilah* is called the "closing of the gates", as we say in *Neilah*: "Open up for us at the time of the closing of the gates." A gate is also called *deles*, which has the same letters as the word *dalaas*, hinting to how the *beinonim* (represented by the *dalaas*) at that time can connect himself to the level of the righteous and uplift the wicked. The *beinoni* opens a new door by *Neilah* and enables even the wicked to be uplifted then.

The Depth Behind Dipping The Apple In The Honey

The *Gemara* lists five *simanim* to eat, but as we know from *Shulchan Aruch* and as almost every Jew in the world does – we dip the apple in the honey. There are many reasons given for why we eat specifically an apple. According to the lines of our discussion, it is because apple means *tapuach*, from the word *pesach*, opening.

¹⁰ In *Chullin*, Chapter "Eilu Treifos."

The first *siman* listed in the *Gemara* is *kara* (or *dalaas*), thus, since *kara* is the first *siman* listed (although we don't have the custom nowadays to eat it first), all the other *simanim* are headed by *kara\dalaas*. *Kara\dalaas* is essentially the door to all the other *simanim*. Thus, we eat an apple, which is *tapuach*, related to the word *patuach*, to open the doors – and we eat it with honey, which “sweetens” what goes on by the door. The sweetness of the honey is what removes the closed doors and allows for an opened door.

Yaakov left the room of Yitzchok by the blessing at the same time that Esav entered. They miraculously did not each meet each other. The depth of this is because when the “doors” are “opened”, nothing can clash. Esav is called *ish seir*, a hairy man, because he represents hair, and hair is above the head, which hints to how he is like a removed head; a removed head symbolizes death, so Esav is like the hair, removed from his head, dead. Meeting with Esav is like meeting up with death, but when there is an “opened door”, symbolized by the *dalaas\deles*, nothing is closed.

[That is the message behind the *dalaas*, which is related the word *deles*, door – to show us that there is a new door being opened, all that was closed has been opened for us, and the opportunities are thus endless. This level will be fully revealed in the future. As for us who live in the current era, the *dalaas* reminds us that we can open for ourselves a new door.]

There is a door that can lead to the palace or a hallway, but the door that leads to the King is unlimited, because the King is unlimited in His power (“A king breaks fences”). When the *malchus* (kingship) of Hashem will be totally revealed in the future, it will be revealed that His *malchus* is unlimited; it will be an opening that has no end, no closing to it.

In the current *Rosh HaShanah* we are in, all is written and decreed; the year is sealed for a person. But when the “doors” get “opened” in the future, all seals will be torn, because there will be the revelation of the Endless, which is the eternal life that was contained in the *Eitz HaChaim*.

Conclusion

Thus, *kara\dalaas* is the first of the listed *simanim* on *Rosh HaShanah*, and it represents the entire depth to how we elevate ourselves on *Rosh HaShanah* from a lower level to a higher level, that “we should be as a head, and not as a tail”.

The main *Avodah* of *Rosh HaShanah* is *Malchiyos*, that the kingship of Hashem be declared by us upon ourselves, and it is represented by the *siman* of *dalaas*, which is how we elevate ourselves from the lower level to the higher level.