

Deeply Rooted:

The Surprising Origin of the Apple (and Etrog) on Rosh Hashana

Do you eat an Etrog on the first night of Rosh Hashana? You might be surprised to hear that the Tur thinks we should.

טור אורח חיים סימן תקפג

אמר אבאי, "השפטא דאמרתת סימנא מלטה היא", וזה אינש רגיל למייל בראש שפטא אתרוגא, קרי, רוביא, קרתי, סלק, ותמרי. רוביא – פירוש ר"ש: תקלת. רוביא – הרבה זכיותינו ...

"Abaye said, "Now that we have concluded that "omens have significance," a person should eat at the beginning of the year **an Etrog**, a gourd, fenugreek, leeks, beets, and dates. Rashi defines the Rubiah as a gourd. (We eat) Rubiah (as a symbol) that our merits should increase (from Harbeh – many) ..."

While the first part of the Tur is otherwise a direct quote from the Gemara (Keritut 6a), our extant text of that Gemara never mentions an Etrog. In fact, the idea of eating an Etrog is not mentioned in either of the two passages of Gemara (in Keritut or in Horayot 12a) which discuss the special foods eaten on the night of Rosh Hashana. It is also never mentioned again in the Shulchan Aruch, the Rama, or any other significant Halachic code.

The Ma'amar Mordechai (a commentary on the Shulchan Aruch) surmises that this mention of the Etrog in the Tur is a typo. He bases this assumption on the fact that the Tur does not proceed to give any justification for eating an Etrog on Rosh Hashana, unlike the other foods about which the Tur does indeed give reasons.

פירוש המאמר מרדכי לשלחן אורח חיים סימן תקפג

| מאמר הל | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| כמחאות שפטו נס פירדי שאלומות טקכו כט | טזין וכחוך אכתי כמחאים קודס פטוק ית |
| טזות וג"ג פטוק תחילס זרין חמי מותג ע"ג | ותקנול סכנ עקי: |
| סיטן תקפג (א) רוכי | |
| תקפג | |
| כטוע להרונע קרי רוכי כרמי | |
| וכו' אכטב נורן אל לתקרונע ליטע' | |
| כנמייה נוקמי רידן ע"ב וקרוב | |
| חמי גומי דגס כטוע סוח ט"ס | |
| דסח אח'כ כאנא לכהר קס' טוב | ובשייאכי |
| טנכל אל וו' נא הוכיר לתקרונע ולע' | כראה יוכ |
| קמי יסיך טליות סימנה ודריך רלה | |
| יוסף אל כ"כ ע"ג זאנן טפש | לעכינע לתקרונע וו'מי קוכיה: |

Our master writes, “The Etrog is not mentioned in our texts of the Gemara.” And I am nearly certain (קרוב אני לומר) that it is a scribal error (טעות סופרים) (ט”ס = טעות סופרים), because after this, when he (the Tur) comes to explain the reasons for every single symbol, he never mentions the Etrog, and he does not bring a reason for it. But the Rosh Yosef does not say this; see there, where he gives a reason for eating the Etrog, but it is not logical.

The notes of the Chidushei Hagahot on the Shirat Devorah edition of the Tur, after citing the Ma’amar Mordechai, point out that the Etrog is in fact mentioned in early editions of the Tur, implying that it is likely not a typo. If that is the case, what would in fact be the ostensible reason for the Tur mentioning eating an Etrog on the first night of Rosh Hashana?

As the Tur proceeds, he mentions the famous custom of eating of an apple and honey as a blessing for a sweet new year. To this point, the Darkei Moshe cites a Maharil that there is a fascinating and unexpected additional reason for the apple, namely that it alludes to the “Field of Apples” (שדה תפוחים) referenced by Ya’akov in his blessing to Yitzchak:

פירוש דברי משה לטור סימן תקפג סעיף קטן א
ומה נשלוקין תפוחים, כדי לרמז על שדה תפוחים הידוע, הנזכר במקרא (בראשית כ:כ), “ראה ריח בני קריים שדה” – עד כאן לשון מהרייל:
“And the fact that we take an apple **is to symbolize the Field of Apples**, which is known, and which is hinted at in the Pasuk (Bereishit 27:27): “I see that the scent of my son is like the scent of the field that Hashem has blessed” – until here are the words of the Maharil.”

ספר בראשית פרק כד פסוק כד
וינשך, וינשך לו, וירח את ריח בגדיו, ויברכוהו, ויאמר, “ראה ריח בני קריים שדה אשר ברכו ה’.”
And he approached, and he kissed him, and he smelled the scent of his clothing, and he blessed him, and he said, “I see that the scent of my son is like the scent of **the field that Hashem has blessed**.”

As Rashi understands this Pasuk, Ya’akov noted that Yitzchak smelled like the “Field of Apples,” namely, like Gan Eden itself:

פירוש רש”י לספר בראשית פרק כד פסוק כד
יריח וגנו. ובהלא אין ריח רע יותר משתוף העזים? אלא מלמד שבקנסה עמו ריח גן עדן.
And he smelled etc. – Now, is there any worse smell than the smell of goats? Rather, this teaches us that he was infused with the scent of **Gad Eden** (the Garden of Eden).

קריים שדה אשר ברכו ה’. שנטן בו ריח טוב, וזה שדה תפוחים – קה דרשו רצ”ל.
“Like the scent of the field that Hashem has blessed.” – That he was given a pleasing scent, and this is the Field of Apples – this is how this is explained by the Sages.

So when the Darkei Moshe says that the reason we eat an apple on Rosh Hashana is to symbolize the Field of Apples, he means Gan Eden. But why a symbol of Gan Eden on Rosh Hashana?

Before we answer that, we must consider what fruit was eaten in Gan Eden. The Gemara discusses the Pasuk from Bereishit that we cited above:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כט עמוד ב

"ז' אמר ראה ר' ינאי קריית שדה אשר ברכו ה', אמר רב יהודה בריה זרב שמואל בר שלית משמעיה זרב: קריית שדה של תפוחים."

"And he said, 'I see that the scent of my son is like the scent of the field that Hashem has blessed.'" – Rav Yehuda the son of Rav Shmuel the son of Sheilat said in the name of Rav: "**(It was) like the scent of a field of apples.**"

The Ba'alei HaTosafot are unsatisfied with our believing that it is definitely apples which Yitzchak smelled like, and they offer the following qualifier:

פירושתוספות לתלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף כט עמוד ב

של תפוחים. יש מפרשין תפוחים קריית אתרוגים:

"Of apples" – Some explain that these apples had **the scent of Etrogim**.

So while Ya'akov noted Yitzchak's scent as being like a Field of Apples (i.e. Gan Eden), these apples might have smelled like Etrogim. This brings us back to the beginning of our discussion, all those paragraphs ago. Why would we have an Etrog on our table, in addition to an apple? Because the primordial fruit of Gan Eden might have been an apple with the scent of an Etrog. But we still don't know what all this has to do with Rosh Hashana.

Those who are accustomed to saying or singing the Kabbalistic "Atkinu Seudata" before each Shabbat meal – or at least during Seudah Shelishit – know that we invoke the Field of Apples, the **חקל תפוחין**, inviting it to join us at our meal. Here the reference is to Hashem, not to an actual (or even metaphysical) apple orchard, but the personification with which we endow Hashem here is deliberately patterned after the primordial foodstuff which led to Adam's downfall and which was reinvigorated in the guise of Yitzchak several generations later. But unlike the rest of the year, when we issue this invitation in the "Atkinu Seudata" song, on the night of Rosh Hashana we make this symbol more tangible. Why is it that specifically on Rosh Hashana we more tangibly represent the **חקל תפוחין**, the Field of Apples, with an apple or an Etrog?

Recall that Rosh Hashana, the 1st of Tishrei, is not truly the birthday of the world, as it seems from our Machzor, but the day in which Adam and Chava were created, sinned, and were exonerated:

מדרש ויקרא רבה פרשה כט:א

תני בשם רבי אליעזר, בעשרים וחמשה באלול נברא העולם ... ביום ראש השנה, בשעה ראשונה, עליה במחשכה; בשניה, נתיעץ עם מלאכי השרת; בשלישית, כנס עפרון; ברביעית, גבלו; ב חמישית, רקמו; בששית, עשו אלים; בשביעית, נפח בו נשמה; בשמינית, הכנסו לגן; בטשיעית, נצטו; בעשירית, עבר; באחת עשרה, דzon; בשתים עשרה, יצא בדים. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לאדם, זה סימן לבני: כשם שעמדת לפני בדין פ' זה ויצאת בדים, כה עתידין בניך לעמוד לפני בדין ביום זה ויצאי: לפני בדים. אימתי? בח' של השבעי, באחד לח'.

*It was taught in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: **On the twenty-fifth of Elul, the world was created** ... On the day of Rosh Hashana, in the first hour it entered His thoughts, in the second [hour] He consulted with the ministering angels, in the third He gathered his dust, in the fourth He kneaded it, in the fifth He shaped it, in the sixth He made it into a lifeless body, in the seventh He breathed a soul into him, **in the eighth He brought him into the Garden, in the ninth he was commanded, in the tenth he transgressed, in the eleventh he was sentenced, in the twelfth he emerged with a pardon.** The Holy One blessed be He said to Adam: **'This is a precedent for your descendants.** Just as you stood trial before Me this day and emerged with a pardon, **so your descendants are destined to stand trial before Me on this day and emerge before Me with a pardon.'** When? "In the seventh month (Tishrei), on the first of the month (Rosh Hashana)."*

שזה תפוחים, חקל תפוחין the Field of Apples, and were expelled from Gan Eden, but it is also the day on which they were forgiven for their sin and allowed to live in exile. Now we can start to understand that having the Etrog and the apple together on the table at this moment of the year is actually quite significant. Adam was banished from Gad Eden on the 1st of Tishrei for partaking of a forbidden apple which had the scent of an Etrog. We, who have forever sought to return to this hallowed ground, invite its eminence to every Shabbat meal, as Ya'akov noted its presence in the form of Yitzchak. But it is only on Rosh Hashana, at the very time that we first lost access to this holy place, that we place its representative on our table. And while these symbols represent Adam and Chava's mistake, they likewise represent our ancestors' ability to engage in Teshuva. Thus these symbols are especially apt for our Rosh Hashana meal, when we should all be engaged in thoughts of Teshuva.

The ancient apple which had the scent of an Etrog begets our table's apple and Etrog, at least as envisioned by the Tur. We no longer have an Etrog on our table, but its message belongs at every Rosh Hashana meal. Like Adam and Chava, we have the power to overcome our past and remain in the good graces of Hashem despite our own personal exile, a message which is particularly apt for Rosh Hashana. May we seize this opportunity this and every year.