

TEXT STUDY

Why Do We Celebrate Rosh Hashanah Like This?

Questions to Ponder

Imagine appropriate festive or symbolic foods to be eaten at each of the heads of the year.

Hint

On Rosh Hashanah, the new year for years, we eat apples and honey because apples are round like the year and we want the year to be sweet...

What other heads of the year can you think to create?



Rosh Hashanah 2a:1-4

Mishnah: There are four “beginnings of the year.” The first of Nissan is the beginning of the year for kings and holidays. The first of Elul is the beginning of the year for animal tithes. Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon say [animal tithes start] on the first of Tishrei. The first of Tishrei is the beginning of the year for years, for the Sabbatical years, the Jubilees, for planting, and for vegetables. The first of Shevat is the beginning of the year for trees, so says Beit Shammai. Beit Hillel says it is the 15th of that [month]

Leviticus

23:23-25

(23) And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:
 (24) Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation. (25) Ye shall do no manner of servile work; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD

Questions to Ponder

What are the essential activities of the holiday described in the text?

What are some of the ways you can imagine observing the above holiday?



Taanit 20a:16-20b:3

Our Rabbis have taught: . . . A person should always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar.

It once happened that R. Eleazar the son of R. Simeon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding his donkey by the river and he felt a great happiness and full of himself because he had studied a lot of Torah. A particularly ugly man happened upon him and said to him, Peace be upon you, Rebbe, and he [R. Eleazar] did not respond.

He said to him, Good for nothing! How ugly this man is! Are all the people of your city as ugly as you are?

The man said: I do not know, but go and tell the artisan who made me, how ugly is the vessel which you have made.

When he [R. Eleazar] acknowledged in his gut that he had done wrong, he got down from his donkey and prostrated himself before the man and said to him, I submit myself to you; forgive me.

Questions to Ponder

How have I been like the cedar this past year?

How have I been like the reed?

He said to him: I will not forgive you until you go to the artisan that created me and tell him: How ugly is the vessel that you created.

He [R. Eleazar] walked behind him until he reached his city. When his fellow citizens came out to meet him greeting him with the words, 'Peace be upon you Rabbi and teacher,' the man asked them, 'Who are you calling Rebbi, Rebbi?'

They replied "The man who is walking behind you.'

He said to them: 'If this man is a Rabbi, may there not be any more like him in Israel!'

They asked him: 'Why?' He replied: 'He did such and such to me.'

They said to him: 'Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is a man of great Torah learning.'

The man replied: 'For your sakes I will forgive him, but only if he does not make a habit of acting this way.' Immediately, R. Eleazar, son of R. Simeon, entered [the Beit Midrash] and expounded, A man should always be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar.

And for this reason, the reed merited that it should be made a quill for the writing of the Torah scroll, phylacteries and mezuzot.