



## Webinar Discussion Guide

### Beyond Apples and Honey — Reimagining Rosh Hashanah Rituals for Grandparents

By Rabbi Vanessa Ochs, Ph.D.  
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#### Purpose

This guide supports discussion of the Jewish Grandparents Network webinar, **Beyond Apples and Honey — Reimagining Rosh Hashanah Rituals for Grandparents**, led by Rabbi Vanessa Ochs, Ph.D., on September 1, 2026.

#### Key Takeaways

- The familiar Rosh Hashanah meal traditions may feel just right for your family. Or you may wish to introduce new practices that embrace and delight your family and friends.
- Beyond apples and honey, there are other foods that symbolize sweetness and wellbeing in the coming year. The Talmud and Sephardic traditions teach that there are “omen foods” (*simanim*) we can prepare and eat that symbolize our hopes for the year ahead.
- Even if we are far away from our grandchildren, we can join for a Rosh Hashanah dinner on FaceTime or video conferencing, and we can send sweet wishes and food items their way.

#### Reflection Questions

- Which aspects of your own Rosh Hashanah traditions growing up do you wish to continue with your grandchildren?
- What stories about Rosh Hashanah from your past might you wish to share at the table?
- What kinds of discussions about hopes for the new year do you hope to foster? Do you see yourself as the facilitator, or can you encourage others (including grandchildren) to step up? Consider discussing any of the following:

- What are you hoping for in the coming year? What are you excited about? What kind of renewal (for yourself or the world) are you hoping for?
- If yours is a multifaith or mixed-heritage family and guests:
  - How might you explain how the Jewish New Year and the secular new year are alike and different? (*time of year; Rosh Hashanah is about more than celebration, it's also a time for self-reflection and seeking to strengthen our relationships*)
  - Invite guests of different traditions to tell stories of how their families mark their New Year with wishes for happiness, health, and good fortune.
  - Might you invite guests of different backgrounds to make a sweet contribution that reflects their culture?
- How can you create connections on the New Year when your grandchildren live far away and you can't be together for the holiday? What good wishes and sweet treats might you send in advance of the holiday?

## Rosh Hashanah Celebratory Practice

*How to create a family-, friends-, and neighbor-friendly Rosh Hashanah Omen Food Seder (or Simanim Seder).*

1. **Choose the time to hold your gathering.** You may wish to hold your family celebration on the first or second night of Rosh Hashanah, at lunch, or when family can get together in person or on FaceTime or video conference.
2. **Select omen foods.** These can include: apples and honey, dates, string beans, fenugreek, beans, leeks, Swiss chard, pomegranates, the head of a fish or a head of lettuce, carrots. You can turn to traditional recipes if you like to experiment, or keep things simple, putting out dried dates, sliced apple, sliced carrot, fresh beans, and Swedish fish candies. Find three omen recipes [here](#).
3. **Create a text.** Write or compile a brief text that works for your family's interest and attention span, just as you might prepare a custom-made Haggadah for Passover. We share two examples below.

**Example 1 — Pomegranate:** In addition to being one of the seven species of the Land of Israel, pomegranates are symbolic in Judaism. Their seeds represent the 613 mitzvot and can also symbolize the many blessings that we hope will manifest in the coming year.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ (וְאֲמוֹתֵינוּ), שְׁנֵהֲיָה מְלָאִים מְצוֹת כְּרָמוֹן

*Yehi ratzon milfanecha Adonai eloheinu v'elohei avoteinu (v'imoteinu), she'nihiyeh m'lei'im mitzvot ka'rimon.*

May it be Your will, God of our ancestors, that we be filled with mitzvot like a pomegranate (is filled with seeds).

**Example 2 — Apples dipped in honey:** Apples eaten with honey represent our hopes for a sweet new year.

Find the apples and honey blessings [here](#).

## Additional Resources

[Rosh Hashanah Simanim: Blessings and Corresponding Foods](#) by Li Gill

From Anu Museum, the meaning of the symbolic food *simanim* at Rosh Hashanah

[Two New Years](#) by Richard Ho

A children's book about a family that celebrates both Jewish and Chinese New Year and points to similarities

**Texts to inspire your own Rosh Hashanah seders:**

[How to Lead a Sephardic Rosh Hashanah Seder](#) (My Jewish Learning)

[The Rosh Hashanah Haggadah](#) (Rabbi Barbara Aiello)