

Rosh Hashanah 5764 – *Dipping the Apple in Honey*

One of most charming מנהגי ר"ה is the custom of taking fruits whose names denote are wishes for a happy new year – carrots, מערן, שירבו זכויותינו; a fish head, שנהיה לראש, dipping the apple in honey for a sweet year.

Source: אמר אביי השתא דאמרת סימנא מילתא כו' – גמרא כריתות

The בני יששכר offers a profound analysis of this idea – profound and poignant.

And והלא ט' הן? – ר"ה in גמרא. בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם: ר"ה in Mishnah. בראשית נמי מאמר הוא: answers גמרא.

Obvious difficulty: Why, if בראשית is a מאמר, doesn't it say ויאמר like all the others?

Answers the great maggid of Mezritch: The words of creation are expressed in the letters of the א"ב, in language. The א"ב is the instrument of creation. But the א"ב itself had to be created. And, indeed, it was – in that first מאמר of בראשית ברא – which he renders: In the beginning Hashem created א"ת – אל"ף – the א"ת, from א to ת.

So that first מאמר preceded language altogether. And so it could not be expressed as a מאמר – it precedes language altogether, and makes language possible.

Following this line of thought, the בני יששכר explains that on ראש השנה we return to the starting point of creation, before language even exists. And so we express our wishes and our תפילות for the coming year – not only in the words of תפילה, constituted of letters and words – but also in the wordless expression of the סימנא, מילתא, of the סימנים, the apple and the honey and the rest.

I would like to add something to this beautiful idea of the בני יששכר. As we stand here at the start of the new year, each of us has many things that we wish for in the coming year. We ask הקב"ה for health, for נחת, for פרנסה, for security, for peace – for all the many, many ingredients that go into making a happy life. And we express those wishes in our thoughts and our words as best we can. And we hope that our תפילות will be accepted.

But there are other wishes that we have for the coming year that we cannot express in words. These are the wishes that we can hardly articulate even to ourselves, and the needs of which we are not yet aware; the half-formed dreams and half-glimpsed possibilities, the vague stirrings of our heart which we cannot yet articulate... wishes for הצלחה in pursuits we have not yet undertaken ... guidance in challenges that have not yet arisen... deliverance from threats that have not yet appeared... נחת from children who have not yet been born...

wisdom for dilemmas that have not yet been posed... recovery from sickness that has not yet been contracted... realization of dreams we have not yet dreamed...

These are the תפילות that cannot be expressed in words. צרכי עמך מרובים ודעתם קצרה; we from whom the future is hidden cannot begin to know, much less to express, all the many תפילות that we really need to daven for the coming year.

And so we offer a תפילה without words; a תפילה where words would fail. We dip an apple in honey and silently pray that the year will be as sweet. We eat all the many סימנים and pray that year will live up to their symbolism. A year in which all the unspoken wishes of our hearts will be fulfilled. A year in which all the unspoken needs of people will be met. A year in which all the undeclared enemies of Israel will be defeated. A year in which all their unhatched plots will be foiled. A year in which children yet unborn will be healthy and safe. A year in which all the dreams that we have not yet even begun to dream will be fulfilled. A year in which deliverance we cannot even imagine will come about. A year of peace and tranquility for us and for all of בית ישראל – Amen.

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