

# An Apple a Day Keeps the Virus Away



# the elul project

We all know the old adage that 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away'.

Where did that saying come from, and does it have any relevance to us right now?

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away" is an old English proverb that basically means that eating nutritious food will make you healthier. As a result, you won't need to go to the doctor very often.

The phrase can be traced back to 1866, when Notes and Queries magazine published the first-known example of the proverb: "Eat an apple on going to bed, and you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread."

By the turn of the 20th century, several variations of the rhyme circulated around England, including the now-popular "an apple a day keeps the doctor away."

So what was it about apples that the English thought was so healthy? As it turns out, the English of that time used the word "apple" to describe any round fruit that grew on a tree.

Essentially, they believed that eating fruit daily promoted good health.[1]

We are about to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, which is symbolised by apple and honey. There are many different explanations as to why an apple is used. One explanation is that it comes from the Garden of Eden:[2]

The apple symbolizes Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden), which according to the Midrash has the scent of an apple orchard, and in Kabbalah is called "the holy apple orchard." When Isaac commented regarding his son Jacob, "Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field, which the L-rd has blessed" (Genesis 27:27), the biblical commentator Rashi explains that this refers to the scent of an apple orchard, the scent of Gan Eden.

Furthermore, when Solomon depicts the love G-d harbors for His nation, he writes (Song of Songs 8:5): "Beneath the apple tree I aroused you[r love]." Eating an apple on Rosh Hashanah is an attempt to remind G-d of our age-old love.

There are many other mentions of the apple in our tradition:[3]

- The Maharil explains that the apple is connected with "חקל תפוחים קדישין"; when Yaakov came to get the brochos from Yitzchok, he had the smell of an apple orchard upon his clothing. As well as the Kabbalistic explanation, (according to one opinion) this episode happened on Rosh Hashana (GR"A O.C. 583:8)
- There are three types of benefit derived from an apple; taste, sight and smell. This is symbolic of our appeal for sustenance in the three aspects of children, health and livelihood for the entire year (Ben Ish Chai, first year Parshas Nitzavim).



**GAIL PARATZ**

Gail Paratz is a retired High School Art teacher, and a mother to two adult sons. She was raised in Melbourne but is a staunch Brisbane of 33 years. She is Vice President of the NCJWA Brisbane section, and has a deep interest and is active in interfaith activities. She was the NCJWA Miriam Stein Award recipient in 2019.

## ABOUT THE ELUL PROJECT

An initiative aiming to share stories and teachings from Jewish women leaders in our community. Whilst many of us are stuck at home, or isolated from family over Elul and the High Holy Days, we hope this project will serve to inspire, nurture, and uplift during this difficult time.

**CONTINUED NEXT PAGE**

**NCJWA.ORG.AU**

# An Apple a Day Keeps the Virus Away cont.



the elul  
project

## CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

- It is written in Zohar (Parshas Shmini 4a) that after one drinks wine, they eat an apple in order that the wine should not harm them. Wine represents gevurah (severity) and thus the apple calms the severity. Therefore, on Rosh Hashana we eat apples to pacify the harsh judgement.
- The Zohar in the same place states that the source of all fruit is from the Divine aspect of malchus (feminine), other than the apple which is sourced from the aspect of Tiferes (male). The Arizal says that the summer months represent malchus and the winter months (Tishrei through to Nissan) are Tiferes. Therefore, at the start of the “male” months we eat an apple which comes from “male” source.
- According to Rabbeynu Yona (brought in Rosh Brachos Perek 6 Siman 35), the nature of honey is to change everything that comes into it – even something impure – into honey. (Therefore, one can consume honey even though the legs of the bees may be mixed in). The holiness of Rosh Hashana should convert all bad to good. (Shem Mishmuel Mo'adim Rosh Hashana 5674). Some add that the sin of Adam haRishon and the Tree of Knowledge was with an apple, and we therefore dip an apple into the honey to rectify the original sin.

Whichever of these explanations is preferred, there is link between the apple as being seen as a key to good health, and as being symbolic of a righteous and contented life.

Today we are confronted by the global pandemic of the Coronavirus. We see people's lives and livelihoods being thrown into disarray. We read harrowing stories of families being kept apart, of loved ones being unable to grieve or pray together. It is a time of anxiety and pressure.

We know that an apple itself cannot counter this virus – hopefully we will, through the god-given talents of our dedicated medical researchers, soon have a vaccine that will do that.

In the meantime, however, we can counter the despair, and the fear, brought by the virus if we look to the apple – that age-old symbol of good health and of a coming joyous New Year – to give us hope for the future.

[1] <https://www.wonderopolis.org/wonder/can-an-apple-a-day-chase-the-doctor-away>

[2] [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/591014/jewish/Why-an-Apple-in-Honey.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/591014/jewish/Why-an-Apple-in-Honey.htm)

[3] <https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/20334/why-specifically-an-apple-on-rosh-hashanah>



**GAIL PARATZ**