

Sweetening the Soul: A Mussar Approach to Apples and Honey

As we gather around our holiday tables for Rosh Hashanah, many of us will take part in the beloved tradition of dipping apples into honey. It is a sweet, sensory ritual that signals our hopes for a good year ahead. However, if we look at this practice through the lens of *Mussar*—the centuries-old Jewish tradition of spiritual and ethical character development—this simple act transforms from a standard custom into a profound internal meditation.

In Mussar, character traits (*middot*) are treated like spiritual muscles that require conscious cultivation. The primary materials of our holiday ritual offer a vivid metaphor for awakening three essential soul traits: Joy (*Simchah*), Inner Peace (*Menuchat HaNefesh*), and Loving Kindness (*Chesed*).

The Apple: Finding Natural Joy (*Simchah*)

An apple is inherently sweet, growing easily and pleasantly on a tree. In our spiritual lives, the apple represents uncomplicated, natural joy. It symbolizes the obvious blessings we enjoy—family, health, stable moments, and personal milestones. Dipping the apple reminds us to practice the spiritual discipline of gratitude: to slow down, notice the easy beauty already present in our everyday lives, and celebrate it fully without fear.

The Honey: Cultivating Inner Peace (*Menuchat HaNefesh*)

Honey presents a deeper spiritual paradox. It is uniquely sweet, yet it is produced by a bee—an insect that carries a painful sting. Mussar masters teach that true inner peace (*Menuchat HaNefesh*) is not the absence of struggle, but the ability to remain emotionally grounded amidst life's challenges. When we dip our food in honey, we acknowledge that the upcoming year will inevitably bring both sweetness and "stings." We pray for the inner resilience to breathe through discomfort, lower our egos, and trust that we can extract growth, strength, and ultimate sweetness from adversity.

The Dipping: Stretching into Active Love (*Chesed*)

Finally, the physical act of dipping represents loving-kindness (*Chesed*). Just as honey completely coats and envelops the apple, we are called to let active love wrap around our daily interactions. True *Chesed* requires us to step out of our comfort zones to serve others. When we submerge the fruit, we commit to submerging our self-centeredness, pledging to bring kindness, generosity, and sweetness to our families, our congregation, and the wider community.

A Mindful Table Practice

This Rosh Hashanah, consider bringing a moment of quiet intention (*Kavanah*) to your table before eating. After reciting the traditional blessing, dip your apple deeply into the honey and pause for three seconds. Choose just one of these three traits—Joy, Peace, or Love—that you most want to strengthen in your life this year. Hold that thought, take a mindful bite, and let the physical taste serve as a signature on your soul's commitment to growth, wholeness, and a truly sweet new year. *Shanah Tovah!*

Congregation Am HaYam is again helping you by providing an opportunity to wish others “*L’shanah Tovah*” (“For a good year”) with a gift basket containing apples, honey, and other goodies. Not only will you be able to send your token of friendship but you will be participating in the tradition of dipping apples in honey to begin the year with sweet wishes and hopes. Each recipient will receive the goodies along with the blessings associated with the home ritual, enabling them, with family and friends, to express their joy in and hope for the New Year. Each will receive one basket with all the names of those who purchased it attached. A short explanation will also be included. Your gift will enhance one’s celebration of Rosh HaShanah and help to raise funds for CAH. Please look for the order form elsewhere in this issue of the *Migdalor* for costs and other information. For questions, please feel free to contact Fran Lande at fblande@gmail.com or Brenda Rich at brenda.bashful16@gmail.com
Thank you for your participation.

Fran Lande on behalf of Apples, Honey & More Subcommittee of the Ways & Means Committee



**CONGREGATION AM HAYAM
APPLES & HONEY 2026**

Yes, I would like to participate in the CAH Apples and Honey program.

Please return by August 26th. Deliveries will be September 2nd – September 10th

Please check if you will pick up your bag at services on September 4th or 5th _____

Name: _____ Phone Number _____

Price: If not purchasing for the entire congregation, each bag is \$24 for neighbors, relatives, friends or others.

Entire Congregation \$ 140.

Entire Congregation \$ 140 plus \$18 for each additional bag

I would like to order one for the whole congregation \$ 140. \$ _____

I would like to order an Apples & Honey for the following CAH members:

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

I would like to order an Apples & Honey for the following non-members:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please attach another piece of paper for additional orders if necessary.

Total number Apples & Honey ordered _____ at \$ _____ each \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Please make checks payable to **Congregation Am HaYam** and mail to

Congregation Am HaYam; 4839 Market St.; Unit C; Ventura, CA. 93003