



TORAH VEHA'ARETZ

INSTITUTE

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## The Pomegranate #1

We customarily eat pomegranate seeds on Rosh Hashana, and say: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלוקינו ואלוקי אבותינו שנהיה מלאים מצוות כרימון. "May it be G-d's will .... that we be full of good deeds like a pomegranate." Some even use the pomegranate to say *shehechyanu* on the second night.

Let's take a look at the pomegranate.

The pomegranate tree (*Punica granatum*) ranges from three to seven meters high. It blooms at the beginning of the summer, and its fruits ripen in the fall (September – January). Indeed, one of the reasons that the pomegranate is customarily used for *shehechyanu* is that its first fruits generally ripen around Rosh Hashana. The fruit's Latin name is *Pomum granatum*, meaning "seedy apple," from where the word "pomegranate" is derived. Its circumference can reach 10 cm. Hand grenades, *rimonim* in Hebrew, are named after the fruit since their explosion is



reminiscent of the burst of its many seeds.

At the edge of its red (or yellow) husk, is its calyx or crown (*netz*), which is the remnant of the blossom. In fact, the blossoming stage is called *henetz* (*Shir HaShirim* 7:13).

The pomegranate is unique inasmuch as it contains hundreds of edible seeds.

The origin of the pomegranate seems to be from the south Caspian Sea (Iran), and it was domesticated and imported to the Mediterranean some 5,000 years ago (the time of the book of *Bereishit*).

Pomegranate remains were discovered in excavations in Gezer (dated to 3,000 BCE), Jericho, Arad, and other areas.

The pomegranate has a long shelf life (more than a month without refrigeration), which makes it relatively easy to transport. Its rich taste and many medicinal qualities made it a widespread and sought-after fruit in antiquity. Today, the tree is also planted for ornamental purposes.

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### *Pomegranates as an index in Halacha*

A broken vessel no longer is subject to the laws of ritual purity—*tuma* and *tahara*. The index for the size of a perforation that voids the vessel is the circumference of a pomegranate (Mishnah *Keilim* 17:1; *Shabbat* 95b). Perhaps since this was the largest fruit prevalent in the times of the Mishnah and Talmud. In practice, we are stringent that the size is less than a square *tefach* (Shulchan Aruch HaRav, *Dinei Tikunei HaMikveh*).

More next week B"H. ■

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