Berachos 9:2 - What are זיקין?

According to the Bartenura's second explanation, זיקין are comets.

A comet is relatively small (0.1km – 40km) planet-like body that orbits the sun. Comets contain frozen gas, ice, dust and rocky particles. One might think of a comet as a huge, dirty snowball.

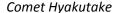


Comet Hale-Bopp, as seen in Croatia in 1997
As a comet approaches the Sun, solar radiation causes the frozen materials in the comet's nucleus (core) to vaporize. Gas and dust are released forming a huge, "fuzzy" atmosphere around the comet called the coma. The force exerted on the coma by the sun's radiation cause an enormous tail to form in the direction opposite the Sun. Both the coma and tail are illuminated by the Sun and may become visible from Earth when a comet passes close by.

The solid nucleus of a comet is generally less than 50 km across and is irregularly shaped; however, the round coma may be larger than the Sun, and comet tails have been observed to extend 150 million km or more!

As of May 2009, there are a reported 3,648 known comets; however, this represents only a tiny fraction of the total unseen comet population, which may number one trillion! About every decade or so, a comet will become bright enough to be noticed by a casual observer. Recent great comets have included Hyakutake in 1996, Hale-Bopp in 1997, and McNaught in 2007.







Comet McNaught