**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #12:**

**The Holiday of Sukkot**

**Part III**

**Arba Minim I**

**Repairing the Plant World**

**What is Hiding Behind the *Arba Minim*?**

**Three Species and One More**

In this *shiur*, we will discuss the meaning of the mitzva of taking the four species (*arba minim)* — *lulav*, *etrog*, *hadasim* and *aravot* — starting with the relevant *mishnayot*.

Generally speaking, the Mishna is not the usual source for studying the inner meaning of the *mitzvot*. Apart from Tractate *Avot*, very little aggadic material is incorporated into the Mishna, and most of the *mishnayot* deal with the laws themselves, not with their sources and reasons. In truth, however, the connection between the laws of the Mishna and the conceptual world of the Torah is far deeper than it might seem at first glance.

The chapter dealing with the *arba minim*, the third chapter of Tractate *Sukka*, consists exclusively of laws: the conditions that determine the fitness of each of the *arba minim*, the manner in which they must be taken, et cetera. On the face of it, it might seem impossible to learn anything about the reasoning of the mitzvafrom this chapter. We will, however, see below that through the structure of the chapter and the order of the laws contained therein, we may uncover the reason and meaning of the mitzva*.* Let us, therefore, examine the *mishnayot* in the first half of this chapter, and try to learn something about the *arba minim* from its unique structure.

The first part of Chapter Three of Tractate *Sukka* discusses the disqualifying factors of the *arba minim*, detailing how to distinguish between species that are fit for the mitzvaand those that are not. The pattern of the *mishnayot* in question is striking in its uniformity: one *mishna* is devoted to each of the species, but there is among them *mishna* 4 as well, which interrupts the sequence of the four *mishnayot*, a matter to which we will return below. The headings of these *mishnayot* repeat themselves, and several laws found in them parallel each other:

A stolen or withered *lulav* is invalid. One [that came] from an *asheira* (idolatrous tree) or from a condemned city is invalid…

A stolen or withered *hadas* is invalid. One from an *asheira* or from a condemned city is invalid…

A stolen or withered *arava* is invalid. One from an *asheira* or a condemned city is invalid…

Rabbi Yishmael said: Three *hadasim*, two *aravot*, one *lulav* and one *etrog…*

A stolen or withered *etrog* is invalid. One from an *asheira* or a condemned city is invalid…. (*Sukka* 3:1-5)

We must pay attention to the sequence of the *mishnayot.* The Mishna chooses to arrange the *arba minim* in the following order: first the *lulav*, then the *hadas*, the *arava* and finally the *etrog.* This order is puzzling, as we might have expected that the Mishna would follow the order in which the *arba minim* are listed in the Torah: "And you shall take you on the first day fruit of a goodly tree, branches of palm-trees, a bough of thick trees, and willows of a brook..." (*Vayikra* 23:40). The Torah opens with the *etrog*, and from there on the order is similar to the order found in the mishna: *lulav*, *hadas* and *arava.*

In addition to the Mishna's deviation from the order of the written Torah, the logic of the order followed in the Mishna is also unclear. In man's world, the primary purpose of a tree is to produce fruit, and so it might be expected that the species that is a fruit would be dealt with in the first *mishna*, and certainly that it would not be pushed off to the last *mishna* in the unit.

Interestingly, the Mishna is not the only place in which *etrog* is situated in the less important place. The manner whereby we fulfill the mitzvareflects this same phenomenon. When the *arba minim* are taken to fulfill the mitzva in practice, Halakha dictates holding the *lulav*, the *hadasim* and the *aravot* in the right hand, and the *etrog* in the left hand (*Shulchan Arukh*, *OC* 658:2). The left hand, as we know, is usually the weaker and less important hand. Joining this fact to the structure of the *mishnayot* seems to indicate that the less important location of the *etrog* is not a coincidence. Why is the *etrog* at the bottom of the order of importance among the *arba minim*, rather than in the most important place?

A similar phenomenon is repeated in yet another place. According to the formula of the blessing recited over the *arba minim*, the *lulav* stands at the center: "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us about taking the *lulav.*"Why doesn't the blessing set the *etrog* at the center, or at least mention all *arba minim*: "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us about taking the four species"?

A second difficulty with the structure of the chapter relates to the fourth *mishna*. The fourth *mishna* deals not with the fitness of the *arba minim*, but rather with the question how many must be taken of each species:

Rabbi Yishmael said: Three *hadasim*, two *aravot*, one *lulav* and one *etrog…*

Rabbi Akiva said: Just as there is one *lulav* and one *etrog*, so too one *hadas* and one *arava*.

As we have already mentioned, there is a difficulty with the location of this *mishna*. It would seem that the natural place for it is after the *mishna* dealing with the last species, the *etrog*; or, alternatively before the *mishna* dealing with the first species, the *lulav.* Instead, the *mishna* appears precisely in the middle of the laws dealing with the fitness of each of the *arba minim*, between the *arava* and the *etrog.* It is not at all clear why the Mishna cuts off the sequence of *mishnayot* in which all of the species are reviewed, and chooses to insert within this sequence the *mishna* dealing with the number of each species that must be taken.

As with the first objection, the second unique phenomenon as well is reflected in the manner whereby one takes the *arba minim*. One does not take all *arba minim* in one hand, but rather one binds together the *lulav*, the *hadasim* and the *aravot* and takes them in one hand, while the *etrog* is taken in the other hand (*Shulchan Arukh*, ibid.). The Mishna is built precisely in the manner in which the mitzvais fulfilled: The *mishnayot* dealing with the *lulav*, the *hadas*, and the *arava* are grouped together, while the *mishna* dealing with the *etrog* stands apart. The separation between them is made by way of the *mishna* dealing with the number that must be taken of each species.

It may be added that the source for the separation between the *etrog* and the other three species is found already in the Torah itself. The wording of the verse is as follows: "And you shall take you on the first day fruit of a goodly tree, branches of palm-trees, **and** [conjunctive *vav*]a bough of thick trees, **and** [conjunctive *vav*]willows of a brook..." (*Vayikra* 23:40). There is a conjunctive *vav* between the *lulav* and the *hadasim,* as well as between the *hadasim* and the *aravot*, but between the *lulav* and the *etrog*, such a *vav* does not appear. The verse itself, then, alludes to a disconnect between the *etrog* and the remaining species, as we saw in the Mishna and in the manner in which the *arba minim* are taken. This, in fact, is the way that Rabbi Eliezer explains the law that the *etrog* is not taken together with the other species in one binding, as cited in the Gemara (*Sukka* 34b):

Rabbi Eliezer said to him. You might say that the *etrog* should be bound with them in one bundle. You may answer: Is it then written: Fruit of a goodly tree **and** branches of palm-trees? It says only: “Fruit of a goodly tree, branches of palm-trees."

If so, the separation between the *etrog* and the rest of the species is alluded to in the verses, it is reflected in the order of the *mishnayot*, and it is found in the laws governing the taking of the *arba minim*. We must still, however, clarify the reason for all this.

Let us summarize what we've seen so far. In our examination of the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim*, we have found difficulties in two areas: in the structure of the *mishnayot*, and in the manner in which we fulfill the mitzva*.*

Two questions arise from the structure of the *mishnayot*: why does the *mishna* dealing with the *etrog* appear last, and why doesn't the *mishna* dealing with the *etrog* appear in succession with the *mishnayot* dealing with the *lulav*, the *hadas* and the *arava*, without a different *mishna* separating between them.

At the same time, two questions arise regarding the practical observance of the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim*: why is the *etrog* taken in the left hand, and not in the right hand, and why are the three other species taken together in a bundle in the hand different from the hand in which the *etrog* is taken, instead of taking all *arba minim* together in one hand.

Confronting challenges in two different realms may intensify the difficulty, but it may also open the gate to an answer. The Mishna expresses, by way of its unique structure, the content of the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* and the procedure by which it must be fulfilled. The structure of the Mishnaand the method of fulfilling the mitzvaare a gateway to the deep content of the Mishna, as we shall see presently.

**Back to the Lost Tree**

In order to understand what is hiding behind the structure of the Mishna and the manner of fulfilling the mitzva, we must delve more deeply into the verses dealing with the *arba minim*.

The Torah characterizes the species that must be taken in a few short words, but takes care to give each species a double definition. The Torah gives each species a botanical definition (*hadar* [goodly], palms, and the like), but does not stop with this. It goes on to say what part of each of the plants must be taken. One must take the "fruit" of one of the species, the "branch" of another, and the "bough" of yet another. As for the *arava*, the Torah does not appear to designate which part of the plant must be taken, but since instead it notes the connection between it and water — "willows of a brook" — we may argue that what must be taken is the part of the plant that connects it to water.[[1]](#footnote-1)

What are "branches (*kappot*)of palm-trees"? A palm *kaf* is one of the parts of the tree, which because of its unique shape bears a certain resemblance to the whole tree. When it is open, it has the shape of a branch from which leaves grow, or of a trunk from which branches grow. It is fit for the mitzvain the first stage of its growth, at which time the *lulav* is closed (*kafut*).In this state, the closed *lulav* stands as the upper continuation of the trunk, and its shape itself is like that of the trunk. In addition, at the end of the growth and opening of the *lulav*, it becomes part of the trunk itself, which is formed from the palm branches that dry up year after year. According to this, the shape of the *lulav* in the *arba minim* is like the trunk of the tree. This being the case, the *arba minim* represent all of the major components of a plant: fruit (*etrog*), branches (*hadas*), trunk (*lulav*), and connection of the tree to water (*arava*).

The world of plants occupies a central place on the holiday of Sukkot. With the mitzvaof the *arba minim*, we connect the four different parts of the plant world to God. According to this, each of the *arba minim* is chosen because of the unique shape of one of its parts. The chosen species are special species in the plant world with which we praise God: the *etrog,* which is a fruit that is unique in its splendor; the *lulav,* which is similar to a trunk, stands at the top of the trunk, and from its branches the trunk is formed; the *hadas,* which has a special branch the leaves of which make it thick; and the *arava,* which is especially dependent upon water, and whose roots penetrate the ground with special intensity to reach the water.

It seems, however, that the taking of the *arba minim* involves something more profound than choosing special species, and praising God through them. Attention should be paid to the fact that the mitzvadoes not involve taking four species each on their own, but rather it requires an act of binding that ties them together. What does this requirement reflect?

The bundle, which joins the various parts together, turns them into a single entity, creating thereby, as it were, a new plant — a whole tree that is comprised of high-quality parts: a tree with goodly fruit, a special trunk, unique branches, and an especially strong connection to water. We go out into nature, identify the unique qualities that are scattered about in it, connect them together with an act of bundling, and resurrect a whole tree, containing all the good qualities, and expressing the complete blessing in the plant world, the full manifestation of the blessing that God bestows upon the world. This blessing is hidden and scattered in the beginning, and it is our role to gather its parts and reveal it once again in the world.

Now we can answer one of the questions with which we opened our discussion: why is it specifically the *lulav* that is mentioned in the blessing, even though all *arba minim* are taken? By way of the act of bundling, we re-establish a whole tree, and the *lulav* is the trunk of that tree. The trunk is the backbone and center of the tree, and therefore it is like the tree itself, and the whole tree is named after it. The *hadasim, aravot* and *etrog* are considered the leaves, roots and fruit of this *lulav.* We wave the tree itself, the *lulav*, as the Mishna states: "A *lulav* which is three handbreadths in length, long enough to wave, is valid" (*Sukka* 3:1). When we wave the spine of the tree, all the other parts of the tree move with it.

If we draw the full picture that emerges from these conclusions, then from the inner perspective on the *arba minim*, the *etrog* is, as it were, the fruit of the *lulav*! Indeed, explicit statements to this effect are made by the Ari *z"l*. Even without fully understanding the meaning of his words which deal with the Divine names, the presentation of the parallels between the *sefirot* (Kabbalistic enumerations or traits) and the *arba minim* portrays the *etrog* as the fruit of the *lulav* tree:

Below it will be explained that the *arba minim* of the *lulav* allude to the four letters of the Tetragrammaton… *yesod* (foundation) is the *lulav*… the *etrog* is *malkhut* (kingship), which is the crown… Therefore [the *etrog*] is called "fruit of a goodly tree," that is to say, the fruit of *yesod* [= the *lulav*], which is called a "goodly tree," and its fruit is the crown… This is the reason that it is forbidden to separate the *etrog* from the *lulav* while taking it, and that it is necessary to join them. (*Sha'ar Ha-kavanot*, *Inyan Sukkot*, 105c)

What picture is the Ari painting for us? The Ari explains that the expression "fruit of a goodly tree" should be understood according to the Torah's inner meaning in a manner different than its plain meaning. The full expression, "fruit of a goodly tree," does not relate only to the *etrog*. The goodly tree is the *lulav*,[[2]](#footnote-2) and the fruit of the goodly tree is the *etrog*,[[3]](#footnote-3) which is the fruit of the *lulav*. In the inner sense, the *etrog* is the fruit of the *lulav*, both of them being part of the same tree.

The Ari also emphasizes the obligation to join the *etrog* to the *lulav*,[[4]](#footnote-4) an obligation that stems from the fact that they are part of the same tree.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is precisely this obligation that sharpens the difficulty that we mentioned at the beginning of the *shiur* concerning the separation between the *etrog —* the fruit of this unique tree — and the other parts of the tree, a separation alluded to in *Tanakh* and prominent in the Mishna and in the mitzvaof binding the three species together. Should the *etrog* be kept apart from the *lulav* as is implied by these sources, or should it be joined to it as is implied by the meaning of the mitzva as explained above and in the words of the Ari? In order to understand this, let us go back and examine the general idea of the holiday of Sukkot.

**The Ingathering of the Fruit Causes the Trees to be Forgotten**

The Torah connects the idea of Sukkot as the holiday of the ingathering to the mitzvaof the *arba minim*. In contrast to the mitzvaof *sukka*, concerning which no such connection is explicitly made, regarding the *arba minim*, it is stated:

When you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord seven days… And you shall take you on the first day fruit of a goodly tree, branches of palm-trees, and a bough of thick trees, and willows of a brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. (*Vayikra* 23:39-40).

What is the relationship between the ingathering and the *arba minim*? The essence of the holiday is the joy of the harvest and the expression of gratitude for it. This joy is not only a natural feeling that is part of human experience, but also an imperative of the Torah. Mankind must rejoice in the produce given to it by God and offer its thanks for it.

The mitzvaof taking the *arba minim*, by contrast, brings about the opposite cognitive movement. It shifts one's attention from being directed exclusively toward the fruit. During the harvest, which is the climax of the agricultural year, a person's attention is directed toward one’s produce. Finally, after much toil and expectation, one may hold the produce grown from the ground by the sweat of one’s brow. The act of ingathering itself takes place by picking the fruit and detaching it from the tree, and it is liable to create also a mental consciousness of disconnection from the wider circles that surround a person. At this stage, a person is liable to look exclusively at the fruit, seeing the tree merely as an instrument which serves one’s pleasure. This is not the Torah's intention when it commands joy in the harvest, but it is liable to be the cost of this joy.

We may of course ask: What's wrong with that? Isn't the tree just an instrument designed to grow fruit for the benefit of mankind? Later in our discussion, we will delve more deeply into this question, but before doing so, let us imagine what the mitzvaof the *arba minim* would look like were it to come to express the joy in the fruit that benefits man.

It seems that, were one to take the *arba minim* out of the feeling that characterizes the harvest, one would take only the *etrog.* At most, one might be prepared to take alongside it the other species — which are part of the tree — in the left hand, the hand that usually serves the right hand. The Torah, however, strikes a different note; through the *arba minim,* it builds a deeper understanding of the tree-fruit relationship. The tree should not to be regarded as a technical tool for fruit production, but rather the tree and fruit should be regarded as two parts of the same thing. Upon deeper consideration, the importance of the tree even exceeds that of the fruit. Just as the parent is not a means of creating the child, but rather the child is a manifestation of the parent's miraculous power to create life and continuity, so too is the fruit a manifestation of the tree's power to be a "fruit tree." The loss of connection to the tree is a loss of connection to the entire expanse of life within which humankind is found, for the sake of the immediate and tangible "here" and "now" of the narrow person, who concentrates exclusively on the fruit.

Taking the *arba minim* in one’s hands is a declaration that the tree is the main thing; the tree is taken in the right hand, and the fruit is taken in the left hand. Then, the joining of the two hands connects the *arba minim* and unites the tree with the fruit. The full circle of life that comes from the Divine source — which brings abundant water that reaches the tree branches by way of the roots and fills the produce — is the whole expanse that surrounds a person and in which one is meant to live. The eating of the fruit of the tree does not stand in a vacuum, but rather is the product of a person's connection to the Divine source, and to the tree which He causes to grow in order to give life to man.

We will elaborate further on this matter in the *shiur* dealing with the *etrog.*

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. A plant has a part whose job it is to create a connection between the plant and water — the root. In this sense, we can liken the role of the *arava* among the *arba minim* to the role of the root of a plant, and indeed the *arava* has particularly strong roots that find their way to the water around them. The Torah, however, does not command us to take *arava* roots, but rather the *arava* itself. The entire *arava* tree expresses connection to water, as it is particularly dependent on it. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This corresponds, according to Kabbala, to the ninth *sefira*, the *sefira* of *yesod*  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This corresponds, according to Kabbala, to the tenth *sefira*, the *sefira* of *Malkhut*, which is also called crown, *keter*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See the doubt expressed by Rav Yosef Karo: must one join the *etrog* to the bundle containing the *lulav* and wave them together, or should one wave only the bundle containing the *lulav*? See also his practical ruling to wave themconnected to each other, based on a dream of the Kabbalist Rav Menachem Recanati, who saw the *arba minim* in the form of the letters of the Tetragrammaton (*Beit Yosef, OC* 651, s.v. *Im tzarikh*; and the ruling in *Shulchan Arukh*, ad loc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The disconnection between the last *sefira*, the *sefira* of *malkhut* (and sometimes additional *sefirot*) and higher *sefirot*, is referred to by Kabbalists by way of a term taken from the plant world: *kitzutz bi-ntiot*,cutting saplings (see, for example, *Sha'arei Ora*, *Sha'ar* 5). The view that sees the mitzvaof the *arba minim* as dealing with one whole tree, and not with a collection of four different plants, the view based on which the Ari explains the prohibtion to separate between the *etrog* and the *lulav* (which are, as stated, a revelation of the *sefira* of *malkhut* and the *sefira* of *yesod* that is above it) makes the expression "cutting saplings" clear and concrete. We will return to this matter at a later point. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)