



TORAH VEHA'ARETZ

INSTITUTE

BY RABBI MOSHE BLOOM

en.toraland.org.il



SUKKOT

About Pitom, Oketz & Practical Tips

THE OKETZ AND PERFORMING THE MITZVAH

The *oketz* is the stem—the part of the *etrog* that connected it to the tree. When shaking the *etrog* along with the rest of the *arba minim*, the *etrog* is supposed to be held in the direction “of their growth” - “*derch gedilatam*” (TM Sukka 45b; Shulchan Aruch OC §651:2). That is, we hold the *etrog* with the *oketz* face-down (which is counter-intuitive), since in the **beginning** of its growth, the *oketz* is below and the *pitom* is above. However, when the fruit forms, the fruit’s weight pushes the *oketz* upwards (Mishnah Berurah, *ibid.*, 17).

When I guide visitors to the Torah and VeHa’aretz Institute, we see on the same *etrog* tree, young fruit with the *oketz* down and mature ripe fruit with the *oketz* up.

In order for the *mitzvah* to be performed directly after the blessing is made (*over la’asiyatan*), the prevalent custom is to pick up the *arba minim* with the *etrog* face- down (the *pitom* face-down and *oketz* face-up). The blessing is said, and the *etrog* is turned over (so the *pitom* faces up), and then the *arba minim* are shaken (Shulchan Aruch, OC §651:5).

Note that if unsure which part of the *etrog* should face up, it is best to place the

etrog on the table when making the blessing, and then pick it up with the *pitom* face-up, and then shake the *arba minim* (Shulchan Aruch, *ibid.*, first opinion cited).

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ETROG CARE

Color: If one purchased a green *etrog*, but wants it to become yellow, place in a plastic bag with an apple for several days (but first ascertain that the bag is not moist). The gasses emitted by the apple expedites the



etrog's ripening process, and turns it yellow.

Storage and care: One should keep the etrog in a closed container (even when purchased way in advance of the holiday). The etrog should not be wrapped in a damp cloth and should be kept away from moisture. This is in order to preserve its beauty for the entire duration of Sukkot. ■




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