



RABBI SHALOM

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Senior Ra"m, Kerem B'Yavneh

SUKKOT

Symbolic Meaning of the Four Species

There is a great deal of symbolic significance attributed to the *daled minim* (four species). We will offer two such interpretations.

WHY THREE HADASIM?

On Succot, we shake the four species, which, according to a midrash, correspond to different parts of our bodies. The *lulav* represents the spine; the *hadasim*, the eyes; the *aravot*, the lips; and the *etrog*, the heart. The Shemen HaTov¹ wonders about a discrepancy in this comparison: Three out of the four species matchup numerically with the specified parts of our body. We have one heart and one spine, like one *etrog* and one *lulav*. There are two *aravot*, like our two lips. Why is it that we take three *hadasim*, which represent our eyes? We have only two eyes, so one would have thought that two *hadasim* would be more appropriate.

The Shemen HaTov explains that a Jew views the world through three lenses: the past, present, and future. This connects to a mishna in *Pirkei Avot* (3:1): "Know from where you came, where you are going, and before Whom you will ultimately give an

accounting." We must be familiar with our past, recognize the present, and anticipate the future. The three *hadasim* indeed symbolize the three **perspectives** that one is to view with their eyes.

THE ANATOMY OF AN ETROG

Rabbi Norman Lamm² develops a very creative idea based on the anatomy of an etrog. At either end of the etrog there are two appendages. Where the fruit was originally attached to the tree is the *oketz*, or stem. At the other end of the etrog where it tapers off to a narrow point, is a small brown appendage, known as the *shoshanta*, or *pittum*. It is reminiscent of the flower from which the etrog blossomed.

There is a dispute among the *poskim* as to whether both the *oketz* and the *pittum* need to be intact for the etrog to be considered a kosher etrog upon which a blessing can be recited. The Rambam disqualifies an etrog that is lacking either of these appendages.

What is the symbolic meaning of these two appendages? As we articulated above, the *pittum* reminds us of the blossom. It is a part of the fruit that protrudes as it

1. Rabbi Bernard Weinberger, *Shemen HaTov – Al HaMo'adim* (1988), 148.

2. Rabbi Norman Lamm, *Festival and Faith*

grows, as if it were pointing in the direction of growth. It represents youthful openness to change and newness. On the other end of the etrog is the *oketz*, or stem, that ties the fruit to the tree. It symbolizes rootedness, stability, continuity and endurance. While the *pittum* points to the future, the stem ties to the past.

If there is no *oketz* on the etrog it is disqualified because it is considered lacking and incomplete. If, however, there is no *pittum*, it is still categorized as complete (*shalem*), but invalidated because it lacks beauty- it is not *hadar*, not beautiful.³

To lose the *oketz*, symbolizes severing one's connection to his roots – to tradition! Without that bond, there is a deficiency and a sense of incompleteness. To be incapable of the *pittum* is to lack *hadar* (beauty). One who is not open to change and to a brighter future, lacks charm, freshness, vigor and color.

Judaism reminds us that we must embrace both our history (*oketz*) and our future (*pittum*), with the proper balance. At times, youth seek to ignore tradition and revolutionize behaviors. At the other end of the spectrum, as we age, we cling to our past and

reject any sort of change. In our religious belief we must combine these views.

In the *amida* prayer we recite: “*Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzhak, V'Elokei Yaakov.*” Why do we need to repeat the word “*Elokei*” before each of our Avot? Why do we not just state “*Elokei Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov*”? After all, is it the same God that presided over each of our Avot? Perhaps this is to highlight that although each of our Avot was connected to God through their father, they each developed a personal relationship with Hashem as well. We must internalize that God is “*Elokeinu, V'Elokei Avoteinu*”. He is our God and the God of our forefathers. We adhere to tradition, but infuse it with newness, within a halakhic framework, so that we can connect to it personally as well.

As we mentioned above, the etrog symbolizes the heart. A healthy heart must possess a harmonious blend of change and stability – of blossom and stem. May we be able to establish the proper balance in maintaining our *mesorah*, adhering to our tradition while infusing it with newness and excitement and solidifying a personal connection and commitment, and may we successfully transmit this treasure to our children. ■

3. The fruit is to be a *pri etz hadar* -the fruit of a beautiful tree (Vayikra 23:40).



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