

The Torah teaches us about Succos.

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵנָף עֵץ-עֵבֶת
וְעַרְבֵי-נַחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

“And you shall take for yourselves, on the first day (of the chag), the fruit of the ‘beautiful’ tree, (date) palm fronds, a branch of a braided tree, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before HaShem your Lord for a seven day period.” (Leviticus 23:40).

There is too much to dissect for one essay. Let us take the first phrase: the Esrog (“the fruit of the ‘beautiful’ tree”). Why does the Torah not identify it as an esrog? Even if the Israelites in the desert did not know what an esrog was, they would identify it when they entered the Land. What is the lesson of simply calling it the fruit of the beautiful tree? Additionally, why is the esrog the ‘beautiful fruit’? Finally, if the esrog is beautiful and so important, why is it not one of the seven species of Eretz Yisrael?

The Gemara in Berachos 57a talks about what symbolism in dreams mean. “One who sees a citron [esrog] in a dream has seen a sign that he is honored [hadur] before his Creator, as it is stated with regard to the citron: “The fruit of goodly trees [hadar], branches of palm trees” (Leviticus 23:40).” We have a teaching that when the Torah first identifies something that is when its true meaning is most revealed, the essence of the esrog is its beauty. The Gemara is saying that the essence of the esrog is beauty.

The Gemara Menachos 27a learns “And with regard to the four species of the lulav, each prevents fulfillment of the mitzvah with the others, as the verse states: “And you shall take” [ulkahtem]” (Leviticus 23:40), which alludes to: A complete taking [lekiha tamma], comprising

all four species.” Thus, the beautiful esrog is only a mitzvah when taken with the other species, even the plain palm frond and willow branch. Alone it does not fulfill its obligations.

We learn another requirement in Gemara Pesachim 38a, “With regard to a citron too, a similar conclusion can be drawn, as it is written: “And you shall take for yourselves on the first day.” (Leviticus 23:40). Here too, the expression “for yourselves” indicates that what you take must belong to you.” Thus, the fruit must belong to the person doing the mitzvah. Not a borrowed or stolen beautiful fruit.

The esrog (and four species) are taken, even if the first day of Succos falls on Shabbos. As it says, “Shabbat 131b, “We can say that it derives from the fact that the verse states: “And you shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of the beautiful trees...and you shall rejoice before the Lord ... seven days” (Leviticus 23:40), from which we infer: “On the first day,” meaning that one is obligated to take it on the first day even if it occurs on Shabbat.” This is not a mitzvah to be passed up, even to protect Shabbos. Conversely, it improves that Shabbos by adding this special mitzvah to it. (Note, in the days without a Beis Hamikdash there is no four species on Shabbos, see Gemara Yevomos 90b).

In regards to the beauty that the esrog is called, the Gemara learns it must apply to all the four species. In Sukkah 29b the Gemara asks: “A dry lulav is unfit both on the first day and subsequently. It is unfit for use because the term hadar is used with regard to the four species, from which it is derived that we require beauty. And since in a dry lulav there is not beauty, it is unfit.” It is not just the esrog that is ‘beautiful, but all the four species must be beautiful. This hints at hiddur mitzvah—making sure when we do a mitzvah it is in a beautiful manner.

The Gemara in Sukkah 35a says further, “The Sages taught that the verse states: “Fruit of a beautiful tree,” meaning, a tree that the taste of its tree trunk and the taste of its fruit are alike.

What tree is that? You must say it is the esrog tree.” That is how we identify the “fruit of a beautiful tree” as the citron.

Rashi learns the fruit tastes the same as the tree. The purpose of creation was for all trees to have this feature. However, due to an error in creation (whatever that can mean) the only tree with this feature is the citron, esrog. He also says “it is called ‘beautiful’ because the fruit remains on the tree from year to year. Most fruit are seasonal, but the esrog, if not picked, will stay on the tree.

Ibin Ezra expounds further on the characteristic that the esrog stays on the tree season to season and says, “the Rabbis transmitted to us the tradition that the fruit of beautiful trees (Leviticus 23:40) refers to the esrog (citron). In truth, there is no fruit of the tree more beautiful than the esrog. The rabbis interpreted the phrase *etz hadar* to mean a fruit which dwells on its tree. It doesn’t fall off the tree. The Talmud (Sukkah 33a) connects the word hadar to the word dar (dwells). It interprets our verse as meaning a fruit which dwells (or remains) on its tree from year to year.” Thus, esrog is ‘beautiful’ because it continues to dwell on the tree.

Tur HaAruch says, “the fruit of a citron tree.” This tree is distinguished by the fact that the taste of its fruit is the same as the taste of its trunk if we were to eat it. Ramban writes that our Rabbis used the word in order to provide us with an allusion to this peculiarity. The fact of the matter is that the tree that in Aramaic is called esrog, is known as hadar in classical Hebrew. The meaning of the word esrog is the same as the Hebrew *המדה*, something lovely and precious. The words *הדר* and *המדה* are almost identical in meaning. It is a fact that both the tree and its fruit are known by the same name, something that is common with certain fruit trees, such as the fig and the fig tree, the date palm, and its fruit, dates, etc. As to the reason for the choice of these four species, we have a tradition that by symbolically presenting these four species as expressions

of our gratitude, the rainfall during the winter season will become beneficial instead of destructive.” With this introduction, let us look at Ramban.

Ramban quotes Rashi and the explanation of Ibin Ezra but then interprets the esrog differently. “The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the tree which is called in the Aramaic language ethrog, is called in the Sacred Tongue hadar, for the meaning of the word ethrog is “desirable,” as Onkelos rendered: ‘nechmad’ (pleasant) to the sight (Genesis 2:9). In our version of Onkelos lo theirog is given as the translation of the Hebrew ‘lo thithaveh’ (Thou shalt not desire) (Deuteronomy 5:18).”

Ramban then quotes several other versions of the word showing how hiddur and esrog are similar. He continues, “Thus the tree and the fruit [ethrog] are both called by one name [as hadar in Aramaic is ethrog], for such is the customary usage of names for most fruits: t’ainah [denotes both the fig tree and the fruit]; egoz (nut); rimon (pomegranate); zayith (olive) and other fruits [in all of which cases both the tree and its fruit have the same name], and similarly this tree and fruit are both called in Aramaic ethrog, and in the Lashon Hakodesh they are called hadar. In line with the plain meaning of Scripture the verse is stating that we should take for ourselves a pri eitz hadar [“the fruit of a tree called hadar” in Hebrew, which is called ethrog in Aramaic].”

Then, Ramban continues. “By way of the Truth, through the mystic teachings, ‘pri eitz hadar’ is the fruit in which there is a great deal of desire, and the first man sinned with it, as it is said, “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.” (Genesis 3:6). Thus the sin consisted of taking the esrog alone.” While we note that Ramban identifies the ‘beautiful tree’ as the esrog because of the Aramaic derivative it appears more that he is simply saying why we call it ‘esrog.’ The name esrog comes from “beautiful.”

Thus, we have the name ‘esrog.’ However, why the esrog tree is called beautiful, that Ramban derives because of its inherent beauty, so much so, that it caused man’s first sin.

In the Beur Ha ‘Ivushi it says, we obtain HaShem’s favor by means of the esrog together with the other species. Thereby using the same fruit that caused sin to cull favor from HaShem.

Chizkuni expounds on this further and says, ““on the first day”. But how can this day be described as the ‘first’ day seeing it is the fifteenth of the month? According to a well-known Midrash, this is a hint that the count of our sins committed after the Day of Atonement on the tenth of the month, had been suspended until that day. Seeing that most people had been preoccupied with preparing for the festival of Sukkot during these four days, if inadvertent sins had been committed, they are “overlooked” on those days.” There is a connection between the esrog and four species and atonement.

He says further, “פרי עץ הדר”, both from the type of trees that produce fruit and from those which are pleasant to look at and which provide pleasant fragrance. ”They are all to be tied together into one bunch. The moral lesson of this instruction is that both the pious people and those less pious but generally observant, are to join in carrying out HaShem’s will.”

The Daas Zekainim says, ““the fruit of the beautiful tree;” the four species of fruit which we use on this festival differ in basic attributes, The citron, esrog, is the fruit of a tree which provides taste as well as a pleasant fragrance. It symbolizes the righteous person who has both Torah learning and good deeds to his credit. The tree from which the palm frond has been taken provides fruit but does not provide fragrance. (Date palm) It symbolizes the average Israelite, who, while having the performances of many commandments to his credit, has failed to acquire Torah knowledge, i.e. he does not exude fragrance. The myrtle branch, hadass, does not bear any fruit but provides us with a pleasant fragrance. It symbolizes the person who did acquire Torah

knowledge but did not translate it into the performance of its commandments. Finally, the willow branch, aravah, comes from a tree that neither provides fruit nor fragrance, (except shade). It symbolizes the Jew who has neither acquired Torah knowledge nor acquired a list of merits for having performed good deeds. The reason that we bind all these four plants together before performing our ritual with them is, to demonstrate that we are aware that the Almighty does not really look down upon us with favor until we have managed to coexist peacefully, regardless of any shortcomings we perceive in one another. The prophet (Amos 9:6) alludes to this concept when he wrote: “Who built His chambers in heaven and founded His vault on earth; Who summons the waters of the sea and pours them over the land.” On this verse, Midrash Rabbah comments that the Lord does all this when we, His people, form a united union. (Vayikra rabbah 30:12) Our author adds that it appears to him that this is also the reason why, on Rosh Hashanah, New Year’s day, in our prayer describing the essence of the day we insert the line: מְלוּכָה וְשֵׁעוֹי nereffid A ”.dnab elgnis a mrof lla lliw yeht“ ,אגודה אחת, explanation: The lulav symbolises the human backbone, הַרְדָּשׁ. The myrtle branch is a symbol of the eye, whereas the willow branch is a symbol of the lips. The citron, esrog, symbolises the heart, the most important part of the human body.”

To summarize, Daas Zekeinim makes the important point that the four species symbolizes every type of Jew, and we are bound together in one organization to serve HaShem, together, with Achdus. The esrog is the heart, where thoughts of love and understanding come from, and thus it is “beautiful.” Only when bound together do we achieve the atonement and closeness to Hashem.

The Kli Yakar explains why the verse says “on the first day” when it is really the fifteenth of the month. He says, “The parable of when people owe a tax to the king. On the

first day, on Rosh HaShana, the righteous go out and meet their obligation. The ten days of repentance the ‘in betweeners’ go out and meet their obligation. On Yom Kippur everyone remaining then goes out to meet their obligation. This is the first day in regards to the four species. It is the four species that recall the First Day of Judgment and combine everyone, the righteous through the less worthy. Together, now stand, in perfect judgment, bound together, having gone through the repentance and forgiveness.”

Finally, we turn to the Gemara Sukkah 33a says, “What is the rationale for the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda that the four species must be a bundle? From where does he derive this requirement by Torah law? The Gemara answers that he derives the term taking written with regard to the four species from the term taking written with regard to the bundle of hyssop by means of a verbal analogy. It is written here, in the context of the four species: “And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a beautiful tree....” (Leviticus 23:40) and it is written there, in the context of the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb in Egypt: “Take a bundle of hyssop” (Exodus 12:22). Just as there, with regard to the Paschal lamb, the mitzvah to take the hyssop is specifically in a bundle, so too here, the mitzvah to take the four species is specifically in a bundle.” Thus, not only are the holidays in general special convocation times to reaffirm our belief in Hashem and remember the Exodus of Egypt, but the bundle of the four species is a reflection of the bundle taken that was a precursor to the Exodus.

The word “beautiful” or *hiddur* refers to *hiddur mitzvah*, beautification of the mitzvah. It should be done in a pleasant and beautiful manner. The beauty is twofold. First, the tree and fruit have the same taste. Second, it lasts season to season. The Torah could have easily said, “take the esrog.” However, we would not learn out the lesson of the esrog that way. Ramban shows us it is easy to identify that we have the correct fruit, that “hadar” is esrog. The lesson the Torah is

telling us, is that the fruit itself is not as important as its traits. This is the same thing with a person. A person is not nearly as important as what the person means to others and the world. A person is not beautiful because he looks nice. A person is beautiful when that person is *consistent*, and raises others up, too. When the person's conduct inside / personally matches the conduct publicly; when the person stays true season to season, year to year. A person is not a "seasonal" Jew but one for life; not a baal chessed only during the Ten Days of Repentance, but tries to carry over the lessons throughout the year. Also, the person is most beautiful when that person is willing to bundle together with the rest, to make everyone whole, to join in a group, all for the greater good. Succos, we are not out for ourselves. We are beautiful together.

Teshuva can be very personal. However, on Yom Kippur we sing the viduy together to show we all have flaws and we are all together. We start Yom Kippur by saying "we pray together even with the sinners." The righteous Rabbi is not saying "I did enough on Rosh HaShana, good luck you sinners." We humble ourselves and consider ourselves sinners, or at least, all on the same level. The esrog, the beautiful fruit, the heart of the People, bundles together because only together can it serve a purpose. Its beauty is not being a 'seven species' but its traits. An esrog cannot be taken alone, cannot be borrowed, or stolen. It must be "owned" and bundled. We can be happy and celebrate with HaShem because we took ownership of ourselves, we became part of the klall, and we are bundled together as one. Just as the hyssop bundle predicated the Exocus, may our four species and *achdus* attitude predicate the coming of the Geula.