**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**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,   
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,   
who have left us in the past 7 years.   
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

Rabbi Joseph Drazin

Leibel Frisch

Israel (Mutch) Yampolsky

Dr. Mark Wainberg

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**Shiur #13:**

**The Holiday of Sukkot**

**Part IV**

***Arba Minim* II**

**Repairing the Plant World**

**The Sin Involving the Tree of Knowledge and its Repair**

**The Tree and the Fruit in the Creation Story**

As we saw earlier, through the mitzvaof the *arba minim*, the four species taken on the holiday of Sukkot, we resurrect, as it were, a tree, each of whose parts has a unique quality. This tree expresses the revelation of the full Divine blessing in the plant world. Let us now go a step further, to the place where God's blessing in the plant world first appears — the Creation story and the story of the Garden of Eden.

When we consider these passages, we find that the question of the relationship between the tree and the fruit, with which we dealt in the previous *shiur*, does not begin in the passage dealing with the *arba minim*. The mitzvaof the *arba minim* gives expression to a point that accompanies the Torah from its very beginning, since the Creation of the World.

Let us open with the Creation narrative. This story is characterized by a uniform account of all events of Creation: at each stage, the Torah opens with a statement of God and continues with the actual execution of that statement. For example, we have: "And God said: Let there be light. And there was light" (*Bereishit* 1:3).

In some cases, however, there is a discrepancy between the Divine statement and its realization in practice. One instance of such a discrepancy occurs on the third day of Creation:

And God said: Let the earth put forward grass, herb yielding seed, and **fruit-tree** **bearing fruit** after its kind…

And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and **tree bearing fruit**… (*Bereishit* 1:11-12).

In God's thought, the fruit and the tree are defined as a single entity — fruit-tree (*etz peri*) — but in the process as it actually occurs, there is a word separating between the tree and the fruit — "tree bearing fruit (*etz oseh peri*)."

The same is true of the first part of Chapter 3 in Tractate *Sukka,* as we have seen, in which *mishna* 4 separates between the *mishnayot* dealing with trees (*mishnayot* 1-3) and the *mishna* dealing with a fruit (*mishna* 5); so too, in the expression "tree bearing fruit," there is a barrier between the tree and the fruit. The barrier is the word "bearing," *oseh* (literally, "doing"). As it were, the very descent from the world of thought to the world of action puts Creation into the framework of the construct of doing, and thus leads to an excessive focus on the result.

*Chazal,* who note this discrepancy in the Midrash, see in this a sin on the part of the earth. They explain that it is for this reason that the earth is subsequently cursed:

And why was it cursed…?

Because it transgressed a command.

For the Holy One, blessed be He, said to it: "Let the earth put forward grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind.” Just as the fruit was to be eaten, so too the tree was to be eaten.

However, it did not do that, but rather: "And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind.” The fruit is to be eaten, but the tree is not to be eaten. (*Bereishit Rabba* 5, 11)

The desired connection between the tree and fruit appears also on the sixth day of Creation. God says to Adam: "And God said: Behold, I have given you every herb… **and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree** (*peri etz*) yielding seed" (*Bereishit* 1:29). In this verse as well, in the citation of God's words, "fruit" and "tree" are linked.

To conclude our examination of the story of creation, let us the mention the words of the Ba’al Ha-turim, who notes the connection between the story of Creation and the passage dealing with the *arba minim* with respect to the relationship between the fruit and the tree. The Ba’al Ha-turim(*Bereishit* 1:29) points out that this expression "fruit of a tree" (*peri etz*) appears only twice in the Torah: in the story of Creation and in the command regarding the *arba minim*.[[1]](#footnote-1) In each of these two places, we find the unity of the tree and the fruit, which is embodied in the fruit.

**The Fruit of the Tree in the Garden of Eden**

Let us move on now to the second narrative in the Torah — the story of the Garden of Eden. The unity of the tree and the fruit continues in this section, in which it reaches a new level: with only a few exceptions (which we will address below), the story speaks of eating from the trees themselves and makes no mention at all of the fruit: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (*Bereishit* 2:16); "Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat" (ibid.3:11); "She gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (ibid. v. 12). Eating of the fruit of the tree is described here as eating of the tree. The fruit and the tree of the Garden of Eden are so united that there is no need to mention the fruit as a separate entity; the tree and the fruit are one.

The only place where we find a separation between the tree and the fruit is in the story of the sin, and there too only when the Torah quotes Chava herself, but not when the Torah speaks about her in the third person. When the Torah describes what Chava sees when she looks at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, it says: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes" (ibid. v. 6). This is a description of the tree from the Torah's perspective, which tells us the story of what happened.

From this perspective, we are still not talking about fruit apart from the tree, but this is not the way that Chava sees it: "And the woman said to the serpent: Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said: You shall not eat of it…" (ibid. vv. 2-3).

According to the woman's formulation, the fruit and the tree are already two different things — connected entities, but nevertheless two. *Chazal* refer to the sin of "Other,” i.e., Elisha ben Avuya, as "cutting saplings" (*kitzutz bi-ntiot*)[[2]](#footnote-2) and the Kabbalists use this same term to describe the sin of Adam.[[3]](#footnote-3) It seems that the source of this term is the sinful act committed by Adam and Chava — severing the fruit from the tree.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Separating the fruit from the tree is not merely an external action; rather it stems from an internal separation between the two. The motivation that drives the woman to eat from the tree is: "that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes.” When the gaze and interest are concentrated on personal pleasure, the picture becomes distorted, and the fruit is perceived as separate from the tree.

In addition, severing the fruit from the tree involves also the detachment of man from God. When Chava detaches the fruit from its source, she cuts herself off from God, who has told her not to eat from it.

In the same manner that we understand the sin, we may understand also the punishment. The statement "For on the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (ibid. 2:17) need not be understood as describing an external punishment. This statement teaches mankind that eating from the tree detaches them from the source of his life, and therefore brings death upon them. Severing the fruit from the tree and its roots reflects humanity's detachment from the source of its life.

The disconnect between the fruit and the tree is reflected in another way in the punishments imposed upon Adam and Chava. Upon Chava it is decreed that she must bring forth children in pain, and upon Adam it is decreed that he must procure his food by the sweat of his brow. What is common to both punishments is the preoccupation with the process leading to the fruit. The sin of disconnecting between the tree and the fruit makes the processes of life in general full of difficulties and complications, be it the striving for the fruit of the tree or for the fruit of the womb.

We see then that the foundations of themitzvaof taking the *arba minim*, which deals with the way in which man perceives the relationship between the fruit and the tree, are found in the story of the Garden of Eden, some of which we have laid out here. Indeed, *Chazal* already reveal this connection to us in their inimitable, pithy way, expressing so much in so few words:

What was the tree from which Adam and Chava ate?...

Rabbi Abba of Akko said: It was an *etrog*.

This is what is written: "And the woman saw that the tree was good for food." She said: Go out and see from which species one may eat from the tree as well as from the fruit — only the *etrog*! (*Bereishit Rabba* 15, 7)[[5]](#footnote-5)

Before we understand what makes the *etrog* unique, and what the connection is between it and the Garden of Eden, let us first consider how the mitzvaof the *arba minim* repairs the sin of Adam and Chava as presented thus far.

**The Work of Repair – Returning the Fruit to the Tree**

As we have seen, the detachment of the fruit from the tree, “cutting saplings,” is the focal point of the sin of Adam and Chava. This detachment, which stems from mankind's focusing on their own narrow world and worrying about their immediate personal benefit, cuts humanity off from the expanse of life that surrounds it. This act turns God's garden into an object of exploitation and disconnects man from God and His commands. In the wake of this sin, God's manifestation in the trees and fruit diminishes.

The mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* is fundamentally a repair of the sin of Adam and Chava, a task that falls upon the shoulders of the people of Israel. In the first stage, one rebuilds the tree, by uniting all of its parts, without the fruit. In the second stage, taking the tree in one hand and the fruit in the other, one finds oneself at the current starting point of the world, where the tree and the fruit are detached from each other, as after the sin. Now comes the central stage of the observance of the mitzva*,* which constitutes the act of repair – joining the tree to the fruit, and waving them together. "One must join the *etrog* to the *lulav* at the time of waving, and wave the two of them together" (*OC* 651:11).

Instead of cutting the fruit from the tree in order to eat it, one brings it before God together with the rest of the tree. The blessing is recited not over the fruit alone; instead, in order to repair the separation between it and the tree, one must recite a blessing over the entire tree: "Who has commanded us about taking the *lulav*." The Ramban briefly alludes to the essence of what we are saying in his commentary on the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:40):

As for the reason for this mitzva, they said in an aggadic manner that these species come to effect atonement regarding water (*Ta'anit* 2b). In truth, the fruit of the goodly tree is the fruit for which there is great desire, the fruit with which Adam Ha-rishon sinned. As it is stated: "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." Now the sin was in the fruit alone, and we effect atonement before Him with the rest of the species. (Ramban, *Vayikra* 23:40)

The Ramban notes that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is the *etrog* (we will deal with this extensively below), and in sparse words he explains how the mitzvaof the *arba minim* repairs the sin:

"Now the sin was in the fruit alone." Adam and Chava sin by setting the fruit apart on its own, by detaching it from the rest of the tree. This sin stems from desire which brings them to worry only about their own pleasure and to detach themselves from their surroundings.

"And we effect atonement before Him with the rest of the species." In the mitzva of the *arba minim* we find the opposite process, of joining the fruit to the tree in order to serve God, a process that atones for the sin and repairs the damage. The mitzvareverses the sin in two ways: 1. Man serves God instead of serving oneself and one’s own desires; 2. Man does this with all parts of the tree instead of detaching the fruit from the tree.

Whereas the Ramban writes with great brevity, Rabbeinu Bachya (*Vayikra* 23:40) expands upon the matter, explicitly mentioning the fact that by joining the fruit to the tree, we repair Adam's sin:

Because our first father [= Adam] detached [the fruit] and sinned with the *etrog* alone, we do not bring the *etrog* alone, but rather we bring it with the rest of the fruit, to join it with all of them and all of them with it. In this way, we repair that which he distorted and effect atonement from God.

**Back to the Mishna**

This process provides the missing link in our understanding of the structure of *Sukka* 3, which separates the *mishnayot* dealing with the tree from the *mishna* dealing with the fruit. This chapter, which deals with the *arba minim*, presents with its basic picture the current state after Adam's sin, a situation that requires repair. In this state, the tree stands on one side, and the fruit on the other, and between them there is a *mishna* that separates.

However, with respect to its content, this *mishna* (3:4) is the only *mishna* in the chapter that deals with all *arba minim*, expressing the unification of all the parts and the connection between the process and the result. The word "one" appears seven times in this *mishna*! This *mishna* joins the *mishnayot* that precede it to the one that follows it, and it parallels the words of the *Shulchan Arukh* cited previously, which say that one must join together the species found in one’s two hands and in that way observe the mitzvaof taking and waving the *arba minim*.

Indeed, some are accustomed to recite the *Yehi Ratzon* prayer before taking the *arba minim*. The text of that prayer reads:

May it be favorable before You, O Lord, my God and the God of my fathers, with the fruit of the goodly tree, branches of palm-trees, and bough of thick trees, and willows of the brook, the letters of Your ineffable name may You join together and let them be one in my hands.

It follows from this prayer that the *arba minim* correspond to the "letters of Your ineffable name," that is to say, the letters which together comprise God's perfect name, the Tetragrammaton.[[6]](#footnote-6) The mitzvaof the *arba minim* generates the repair that brings together those which are separated until they become one. The joining together of the different parts of the plant world is one of the planes on which the Divine reveals itself in the world. This is the plane that is connected to the holiday of Sukkot. The Divine vitality that surges through the world appears on Sukkot by way of the plant world. The joy of the plant world that is felt on the holiday of ingathering — when there is no separation between the fruits, the trees that produce them and their Divine source — is joy in the full manifestation of the Divine.

Through the questions with which we opened the previous *shiur*, we have acquainted ourselves more deeply with the content of the mitzva of the *arba minim*. The separation between the *mishna* dealing with the *etrog* and the *mishnayot* dealing with the rest of the species reflects the detachment of the fruit from the tree, which takes place at the time of the sin of Adam and Chava, a detachment which reflects also man's detachment from God. The Jewish people come to repair this detachment with the mitzva of the *arba minim*.

Setting the *mishna* dealing with the *etrog* after the *mishnayot* dealing with the other species reflects the restoration of the proper relationship between the tree and the fruit — the fruit as an outgrowth of the tree, instead of the tree’s being exploited to produce more and more fruit for human beings who are detached, who desire only their personal benefit and are impervious to all that surrounds them.

The *mishna* that is found between the *mishnayot* dealing with the *lulav*, the *hadasim* and the *aravot* and the *mishna* dealing with the *etrog*, which seemingly creates a barrier between them, deals with the *arba minim* as a single entity, and teaches us that the appropriate place for the fruit of the *etrog* is its inclusion in the whole set of components of the plant, in its becoming joined to the tree.

**Repair of the Eating**

Let us go back and consider the relationship between the ingathering and the mitzva of the *arba minim*, and between the fruit of the harvest and the fruit of the *etrog*. The joy of the harvest is connected to the many fruits which human beings gather in, fruit that is meant for them to eat. By contrast, the fruit of the *etrog* is not intended for eating, but rather for the mitzva*.* Parallel to the story of Adam, the ingathering expresses the idea of "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (*Bereishit* 2:16), and the *etrog* may be identified with the Tree of Knowledge, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it" (*Bereishit* 2:17). The *etrog* itself is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Its evil dimension is manifest because of the possible detachment of the fruit from the tree and of man from God, as happens at the time of the sin of Adam and Chava; and its good dimension is manifest when it is used to connect to God through the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* on Sukkot, with service and thanksgiving before Him.

The main purpose of the fruit of the *etrog* is not for it to be eaten. It is precisely when the Jewish people are not eating the fruit, but rather serving God with it, that they may free themselves from concentrating exclusively on the fruit, instead appreciating the Divine splendor in each of the tree's components.

The desirous and utilitarian perspective takes things apart and detaches them. When a person stops looking at a tree from the perspective of the desire to eat, one gains vision of a great expanse previously obscured. From this perspective, the tree appears now as a central link in the full life circle of Divine revelation. It turns out that the Garden of Eden and its fruit are not a technical means for man's eating. The Garden of Eden is the place of perfect Divine revelation, filled with the blessing of life that appears in its waters, its trees and its fruit, and man is privileged to enter it, to be blessed with Divine life and to be nurtured by them.

The work of repair finds expression in yet another point. The Torah requires that, at the outset, the *arba minim* that a person takes must be one’s personal property. "'And you shall take you' – of yours" (*Sifra Emor* 12, 16; *Sukka* 41b). A person is required to take species that one owns and serve with them before God in accordance with His command. This process is the opposite of what happens in the sin of Adam, where fruit belonging to God is taken without His permission to satisfy man's desires.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge is proceeded by an act of taking: "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" (*Bereishit* 3:6). So too, the fear that they would eat from the Tree of Life, a fear due to which man is banished from the Garden of Eden, relates also to an act of taking: "And now, lest he put forth his hand, **and take** also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever" (ibid. v. 22). Eating that starts with taking is eating as an act of assuming control. Man's gazing on the Tree of Knowledge stirs up the desire to acquire the fruit and swallow it up.

The placing of man in God's garden is apparently directed toward a different type of eating. Eating from God's fruit does not follow from taking control, but from man's integration into the life-cycle of the garden.

This may be likened to breathing. The act of breathing is not seen as man's taking control of the air that surrounds one, taking it from its place and transferring it into one’s possession and use. Instead, the person, as it were, is found in a "sea" of air, so that the vitality that encompasses one fills the person as well, provides one with air to breathe and sustains one. The act of breathing is performed through man's integration in the surrounding expanse of life, of which each person is a part.

Is it possible for a person to encounter the revelations of life around one without taking them for oneself and swallowing them up? Can man see the world and its value as God sees it, "And God saw that it was good" (*Bereishit* 1:10); or will a human being always narrow his or her perspective to the benefits that person may reap, which finds expression in the words: "That the tree was good for food"? This question stood before Adam and Chava in Eden, and the people of Israel answer it through the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim*.

After the Jewish people complete the work of repair during the seven days of Sukkot, during which time they use the *etrog* for rejoicing before God, they may already eat it in a corrected manner.[[8]](#footnote-8) This eating is described in the *mishna* in connection with what happens at the end of the holiday: "Immediately children would remove their *lulavim* [from the binding] and eat their *etrogim*" (Mishna, *Sukka* 4:7).

This account appears to reflect a customary practice among the people, rather than the law, and therefore should have no place in the Mishna; but this practice expresses something very profound. The fact that the *etrogim* are eaten by the children without sin, after the observance of God's service with those *etrogim* is completed, expresses arriving at the level at which eating the *etrog* becomes pure eating. With this, the repair of Adam's sin is complete.[[9]](#footnote-9)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The Ba’al Ha-turimadds: "This is an allusion to the opinion that the tree from which Adam ate was the *etrog*." We will deal with this issue at length later in the *shiur.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tosefta (Lieberman), *Chagiga* 2:3; *Yerushalmi, Chagiga* 2:1; *Bavli,* *Chagiga* 14b. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, *Sha'arei Ora,* Fifth Gate: "The Tree of Life was at first not forbidden to Adam. But after Adam sinned and cut the saplings … he was not allowed to draw near to the Tree of Life, because he had sinned and was under suspicion." [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Rabbeinu Bachya on the Torah: "Because our first father detached (*kitzetz*) and sinned with the *etrog* alone" (*Vayikra* 23:40). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Chazal* offer various answers to the question of the identity of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, one of which is that it is the *etrog*. In addition to *Bereishit Rabba*, *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* (20, 6) also offers this solution. However, this idea is absent from the *Bavli,* as *Berakhot* 40a, which deals with the identification of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, posits three answers — wheat, grape and fig. We will deal with these identifications in other *shiurim* in this series. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is explicit in the story of the dream of Rav Menachem Recanati mentioned in an earlier *shiur,* which likens the *arba minim* to the four letters in the Tetragrammaton, and so too in the passage brought in the previous *shiur* from the Arizal in *Sha'ar Ha-kavanot*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. It is no coincidence that *Chazal* derive the prohibition of stealing that applies to the descendants of Noach from the sin of taking from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: "Adam was given six *mitzvot*… 'Of every tree in the garden' — this is stealing, as it is stated: 'But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it’" (*Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, *Ba-chodesh*, p. 202). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In similar fashion, some Torah authorities write that after the onset of Shabbat, and eating from the Tree of Life, Adam would have been permitted to eat also from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which would have become united with the Tree of Life. See, for example, the *Sefat Emet* (Purim 5654, s.v. *Ha-inyan*):

   It would appear that the Tree of Knowledge was also certainly created to eat from it. But Adam ate from it not at the proper time, before he had been granted permission to eat from it, for it was set aside only for those who would receive the Torah, for with it they could separate the good from the refuse; before Adam had the power of the Tree of Life, he was not permitted to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Another custom — eating from the *etrog* on Hoshana Rabba as a measure ensuring easy childbirth — is explained as a repair of the sin of Adam, by pushing off eating from the *etrog* until the seventh day. This custiom is brought by Rav Ya’akov Shimshon Shabbetai Seniaglia in his *Nezir Shimshon* (Pisa 5543), p. 38, on *Sukka* 3, s.v. *Nitela pitmato*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)