**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

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**Shiur #14:**

**The Holiday of Sukkot**

**Part V**

***Arba Minim* III**

**Repairing the Plant World**

**The Etrog:**

**Repair of the Tree of Knowledge**

**“‘Fruit of a goodly tree’ — this is the *etrog.”***

Which characteristics of an *etrog* make it fit for the service involving the *arba minim*? In what way does it make sense for it to be the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil? Is there a connection between these features of an *etrog* and what has emerged from our studies thus far? We hope to address these questions in this *shiur*.

In Tractate *Sukka*, both the *Yerushalmi* and the *Bavli*, explaining the *mishna* dealing with the laws of the *etrog*, address the reason for identifying the "fruit of a goodly (*hadar*)tree" with the *etrog* and bring several opinions on the matter.[[1]](#footnote-1) An examination of these positions reveals additional angles beyond what we have explored thus far. Let us first cite the texts of the *Yerushalmi* and the *Bavli*, then summarize what emerges from them.

The *Yerushalmi* (3:5) states:

It is written: "Fruit of a goodly tree" (*Vayikra* 23:40). A tree whose fruit is goodly and whose tree is goodly. Which is that? The *etrog*. If you say the pomegranate, its fruit is goodly, but its tree is not goodly. If you say the carob, its tree is goodly, but its fruit is not goodly. Which is that? The *etrog*.

*Hadar* — Rabbi Levi said: That which remains (*ha-dar*) on its tree from one year to the next.

Rabbi Tanchuma said: Aquila translated *hadar* as *hiddur*. A tree that grows close to water.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: "And you shall take you… fruit of a goodly tree." A tree whose fruit is goodly and whose tree is goodly. The taste of its fruit is like the taste of its tree; the taste of its tree is like the taste of its fruit. Its fruit is similar to its tree; its tree is similar to its fruit. Which is that? The *etrog*.

The *Bavli* (35a) states:

Our Rabbis have taught: "Fruit of a goodly tree" implies a tree the taste of whose "tree" and "fruit" is the same. Say then that it is the *etrog*…

Rabbi [Yehuda Ha-nasi] said: Read not *hadar*, but *ha-dir* ("stable"). Just as the stable contains large and small [animals], perfect and blemished ones, so also [the fruit spoken of must have] large and small, perfect and blemished. Have not then other fruits large and small, perfect and blemished? Rather, he said as follows: When the small [new] fruit comes, the large [old] fruit is still [on the tree].

Rabbi Abbahu said: Read not *hadar*, but *ha-dar* ("which remains"), a fruit which remains upon its tree from year to year.

Ben Azai said: Read not *hadar*, but *hýdōr*, for in Greek water is called *hýdōr*. Now what fruit is it that grows by every water? Say, of course, it is the *etrog.*

Thus, the identification of the "fruit of a goodly tree" with the *etrog* is based on three primary considerations.

1. **The similarity between the tree and the fruit**: This consideration finds expression in the identifications that point to a tree whose tree and fruit are similar in taste, and to a tree which itself and its fruit are of goodly appearance.
2. **The lengthy period of time that the fruit is on the tree**: This consideration finds expression in the identifications that point to a tree the fruits of which remains on it from year to year (without falling), and to a tree the smaller new fruits of which appear on it while the larger old fruits are still on it.
3. **The way of watering the tree**: This consideration finds expression in the identification that points to a tree that grows by all water sources.

Each of these views points to a unique feature of the *etrog*, because of which it is called "the fruit of a goodly tree." Underlying these views is the understanding reached in the previous two *shiurim* that the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* deals with the system of tree and fruit and the relationship between the two parts. Each opinion advances us another step in understanding this system. This is the load borne by the phrase "the fruit of a *hadar* tree" in the Torah. "*Hadar*" is the word that characterizes the "tree-fruit" system, and defines the relationship between its components; therefore, the answers in both passages seek to decode the content of "*hadar*"and reveal what is embedded in it, as will now be explained.

**1. A tree which itself and its fruit are of goodly appearance, and a tree which itself and its fruit are similar in taste.**

The *Yerushalmi* brings two similar answers to the question of how the word "*hadar*" leads to the identification of the *etrog*:

It is written: "The fruit of a goodly tree" (*Vayikra* 23:40). A tree whose fruit is goodly and whose tree is goodly. Which is that? The *etrog*. If you say the pomegranate, its fruit is goodly, but its tree is not goodly. If you say the carob, its tree is goodly, but its fruit is not goodly. Which is that? The *etrog*…

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: "And you shall take you… the fruit of a goodly tree." A tree whose fruit is goodly and whose tree is goodly. The taste of its fruit is like the taste of its tree; the taste of its tree is like the taste of its fruit. Its fruit is similar to its tree; its tree is similar to its fruit. Which is that? The *etrog*.

Both of these answers indicate that both the fruit and the tree of the *etrog* are *hadar*. Each answer understands the term *hadar* in a different way.

According to the first answer, *hadar* relates to goodly appearance; whereas according to the second answer, it refers to goodly taste. The first answer initially considers the suitability of the pomegranate and carob trees for the role of "fruit of a goodly tree." The fruit of the pomegranate is unique in appearance, having a crown that gives it a regal look; the fruit of the carob not only is not goodly, but it does not even look like a fruit and is more similar to a branch in its shape and color. On the other hand, regarding the appearance of the tree, the situation is reversed; the carob tree is majestic, while the pomegranate tree lacks all beauty. The *etrog* is unique in that splendor is found in both the fruit and the tree.

The second answer finds the *etrog* as the fruit that fulfills the requirement that the taste of the fruit be like the taste of the tree. That is to say, the tree also has a taste that is similar to the taste of the *etrog* itself.[[2]](#footnote-2)

What these two answers have in common is that they both engage in a comparison between the tree and the fruit. The mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* contends with the notion of a tree as a means of producing fruit and profits, an external utilitarian concept that severs the tree from the fruit and fashions a personality that is focused solely on its own good. The *etrog* is the appropriate fruit for expressing the alternative to this notion on the axis of taste and appearance. It radiates the consciousness that the value of the tree is no less than that of the fruit, in that it shares the beauty of the fruit in its appearance and its taste. Moreover, these features of the *etrog* demonstrate that the fruit that grows from the tree enjoys its elegant taste and appearance, thanks to the properties of the tree from which it has grown. The tree is the source of the fruit's qualities, and it is precisely because of the fruit's connection to the tree that it has all its goodness.

**2. The fruit remains on its tree from year to year**.[[3]](#footnote-3)

"Rabbi Abbahu said: Read not *hadar*, but *ha-dar*, a fruit which remains upon its tree from year to year" (*Sukka* 35a).

Rabbi Abbahu notes another unique feature of the *etrog*. Generally speaking, the fruits of a fruit tree ripen in their season, after which they are found for a certain period of time on the tree's branches; ultimately, they fall to the ground.

This, however, is not the case with the *etrog*. The fruits of the *etrog* tree remain on the tree for an entire year without falling or rotting. The *etrog*, then, manifests in an especially strong manner the connection between the fruit and the tree. The falling of fruits from their tree expresses the weakness of the connection between the fruit and the tree. It alludes to the fact that the fruit is on its way to us even without our taking the initiative to pick it, and this establishes a consciousness in which our whole interest is in the fruit. The phenomenon of the strong connection between the fruit of the *etrog* and its tree is a suitable platform for the perspective that sees the fruit and the tree as a unified whole.

The *etrog*'s feature that it “remains on its tree from year to year” bears an even deeper meaning. A year is not merely some unit of time, but rather a complete cycle of agricultural life. The *etrog* tree is a tree whose fruit breaches the boundaries of the agricultural year. What is expressed by this phenomenon?

Let us remember the difference between fruits and vegetables. Vegetables are sown every year, whereas fruit-bearing trees are planted once and then produce fruit year after year. The fruit is limited by an annual cycle, but the tree itself is not limited to the agricultural year. From the time that the tree grows, it is permanently connected to the ground and its life continues from year to year. Therefore, it is specifically the tree that symbolizes eternity: "As the days of a tree shall be the days of My people" (*Yeshayahu* 65:22).

The fruit is transient, and it will eventually rot.[[4]](#footnote-4) The life and taste that it offers man is also limited to a short time, after which man will need more fruit. The fruit of the *etrog* is unique in its special connection to the tree, which also reveals something of the timelessness of the tree. Thanks to the tree, the fruit of the *etrog* breaks the boundaries of the limited life of the fruit of the plant world, opening a window to eternity.

The timeless feature of the tree offers a new perspective on the relationship between the tree and the fruit. The fruit does give life, but only for one season. The tree enjoys permanence; it grants a person the ongoing security that it will provide him with sustenance year after year. In contrast to the notion of the tree as a means to the fruit, upon deeper examination we see that it is the fruit that is a means, a means of obtaining permanent life from the tree whose vitality is permanent. When viewed narrowly, the fruit appears to be superior to the tree, for it is impossible to eat the trunk, the branches or the leaves, but the fruit can be eaten. From a wider perspective, however, the tree is superior to the fruit, for the fruit offers vitality for a few hours, whereas the tree makes it possible to live a long life. The Divine revelation in the tree that functions as a source of life is greater than that in the fruit, which contains a limited and restricted measure of life resources.

**3. A tree that grows by every water.**

"Ben Azai said: Read not *hadar*, but *hýdōr*, for in Greek water is called *hýdōr*. Now what fruit is it that grows by every water? Say, of course, it is the *etrog.”*

This answer completes the presentation of the unique features of the *etrog*, broadening the discussion from the question of the connection between the fruit and the tree, to the question of the connection between the two of them and the water which causes them to grow.

What is the meaning of the phrase "that grows by every water"? This is clarified when the Gemara compares the *etrog* to vegetables, the nature of which is to grow by means of all water (*Kiddushin* 3a). The Gemara means that the *etrog* depends on irrigation and does not live on rainfall alone. On the one hand, the *etrog* is more dependent upon water than the rest of the trees of Eretz Israel, requiring irrigation after the rainy season has come to an end. On the other hand, as opposed to the rest of the trees of Eretz Israel, which if irrigated not in the rainy season will not yield fruit, the special dependence of the *etrog* on water allows it to produce fruit in more than one season per year, unlike those trees that are limited by the cycle of seasons and rain.[[5]](#footnote-5) The *etrog* is therefore always connected to the water, while the other trees are connected to the water only at certain times — during the rainy season.

In contrast to the connection between the fruit and the tree, clarified by the Gemara's answers discussed above, here we are dealing with the more internal connection between the tree itself and the water from which it draws its vitality. The tree's connection to water is the connection to its source of life. The deeper meaning of detachment from water is detachment from the source of life — God.

The issue of detachment from water is firmly rooted in the laws governing the *arba minim*. The flaw in detachment from water finds expression in the law that disqualifies each of the species if it is dry. The Mishna takes the trouble to repeat this law in connection with each of the *arba minim*. The *Yerushalmi* (*Sukka* 3:1) derives this law from the verse: "The dead praise not the Lord" (*Tehillim* 115:17).

**The Tree of Knowledge – The *Etrog* Tree**

As we have seen above, the connection between the fruit and the tree underlies the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* and the identification of the "fruit of a goodly tree" with the *etrog*. The root of this connection is found at the center of the story of Adam and his sin. The lengthy presentation that we made in recent *shiurim*, the foundations of which are found in the story of Adam, is encapsulated in the following words of Chazal:

What was the tree from which Adam and Chava ate?… Rabbi Abba of Akko said: It was the *etrog*. This is what is written: "And the woman saw that the tree was good (*tov*) for food" (*Bereishit* 3:6). Go out and see which is the tree whose tree is eaten like its fruit. You find only the *etrog*. (*Bereishit Rabba* 15, 7)

This statement of Chazaldeals with the identification of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, pointing to the *etrog*. The identification of the *etrog* as the Tree of Knowledge parallels one of the identifications of the *etrog* as the goodly tree mentioned above, that its tree is eaten like its fruit. The closeness of the tree to the fruit, with respect to its eating and its taste, plays a role in both identifications of the *etrog*.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Is there a connection between the identifying mark that deals with the taste of the tree and the sin itself? To answer this question, we must add the similarity in appearance between the *etrog* and its tree, mentioned in the *Yerushalmi*: "A tree whose fruit is goodly and whose tree is goodly."[[7]](#footnote-7)

When we consider Chava's sin, we find that these same two elements — taste and appearance — are what cause her to focus on the fruit and detach it from the tree, thereby sinning against the Divine command: "And the woman saw that the tree was good for food (= taste), and that it was a delight to the eyes (= appearance)" (*Bereishit* 3:6).

The fruit of the *etrog* tree is goodly in taste and in appearance, but these properties are evident also in the tree, which opens the possibility of not detaching the fruit from the tree as happens in the sin in Eden, but rather connecting them to each other. Chazalteach that the Torah's requirement that the fruit be "goodly" should be expanded. These laws of "goodliness" originally stated about the *etrog* are applied also to the other three species,[[8]](#footnote-8) which constitute the tree in the *arba minim*. Thus, also in the *arba minim*, which, as stated, represent the complete tree, expression is given to the principle of "a tree whose fruit is goodly and whose tree is goodly."

When the "goodliness" does not serve as a factor leading to detachment, a goodly taste and appearance are recognized as praiseworthy, and their proper use repairs the sin of detachment. Wherever goodliness and taste are liable to cause detachment from God, as in the case of the sin of Adam and Chava, they must be distanced; but when they connect man to the tree, to their Divine root and source, as in the case of the *arba minim*, they become a mitzva.

Another opinion among Chazal identifies the Tree of Knowledge with wheat, and this aspect of the tree connects with the holiday of Pesach — the prohibitions of *chametz* and the positive command to eat matza repair the negative act of Adam's eating. The *mitzvot* of *chametz* and matza also revolve around the issue of taste and appearance, and it is interesting to distinguish between Pesach and Sukkot in this matter: On the holiday of Pesach, the *chametz* expresses the dimension of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and by contrast the Jewish people eat *matza,* which represents the Tree of Life. In this way, the Jewish people struggle with the external taste and appearance stemming from the fermentation process, which causes the bread to rise and adds taste to it. On Sukkot, the Jewish people do not eat the *arba minim*, but rather they use them to offer God thanks and praise. It is precisely then that they want the goodly appearance and taste that deepen the quality of the Divine service and what it expresses.

What emerges from here is a fundamental difference between the modes of the service performed by the Jewish people on Pesach and on Sukkot. On Pesach, the repair of the sin is achieved by way of the removal of the Tree of Knowledge from the world, whereas on Sukkot the tree itself undergoes repair, and the danger lies in the detachment of the fruit from it. With the help of the goodliness and the taste that connect the product to its roots, they direct their service to the connection between the fruit and its tree, and thus they remove the evil from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and serve God with the good.

We have seen how the properties of the taste and appearance of the *etrog* tree reflect the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and how they also open up the possibility of repairing the sin. With the help of the additional features of the *etrog* mentioned above — that it grows by every water and that it remains on the tree from year to year — we may broaden our perspective and see how the *etrog* reflects not only the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but also the reality of the Garden of Eden in general.

We saw in the previous section that the *etrog* tree is exceptional among the trees of Eretz Israel in that it relies on irrigation and not on the winter's rainfall. This unique feature turns it into a tree that represents the paradigm of the Garden of Eden, where water flows year-round. As we already noted, the fruits of the *etrog* tree are also not limited to a particular season, as in the Garden of Eden where trees and fruit grow regularly. To this we may also add the *etrog*'s feature that it remains on the tree from year to year. Together, they hint at the reality of the Garden of Eden, where rivers flow throughout the year and trees produce fruit all the time.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This connection between the tree and the water appears in perfect fashion in the Garden of Eden, and reveals the unity of the world, from its Divine origin, through the constantly flowing life-giving waters, to the trees of the garden and their fruit which grant full life to man who is connected to this complete life experience.

**Epilogue**

We set out in search of the meaning of the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim*, contemplating the structure of the *mishnayot* dealing with it, the manner in which the mitzvais performed and the language of the verses in which it is written. This contemplation raised before us a vivid picture, visual as it were, that abstract words might not be able to express: a picture of a tree that is smashed, scattered and in pieces, but that is restored to life as its scattered parts are gathered together from all directions and reunited.

Halakha spells out two stages in this unification process. The first stage is the preparatory joining of the parts of the tree, which still leaves the fruit separate from them. The second stage is the actual performance of the mitzva, which opens with the distance between the tree which is held in the right hand and the fruit which is held in the left hand, then continues with the joining of the two hands, which restores the living connection between the fruit and the tree, leading to the waving. Now the whole tree, including its fruit, moves in all four directions as a living tree, which, through its very movement, expresses the full Divine vitality that surges through the entire tree. In this way, one who holds the tree without taking the fruit for oneself expresses devotion to God, Who gives life to the tree and its fruit, to the entire plant world, and to the individual and the nation who during this time are gathering in the produce of the previous year.

The danger of detachment between a person and the fruit, on the one hand, and the tree and its Divine origin, on the other, is the danger of the harvest season. Like many other elements of the Torah, the roots of this contention are found already in the story of the Garden of Eden and of the sin of Adam and Chava.

When it is created, the Garden of Eden is like Eretz Israel in the harvest season, with trees full of fruit. All that remains is to take them, eat them and thank God for them. Man is left with one test: will the ingathering of the fruit detach man from God, or will it cause man to cleave to Him? Will man choose the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, or the Tree of Life? Choosing the Tree of Life will bring Adam to cleave to God who breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, whereas choosing to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil from which God has commanded him not to eat will detach him from God. Man's being tempted to follow the dictates of lust and detach the fruit from the tree brings about humanity's detachment from God, punishment and expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The mitzvaof taking the *arba minim* turns man's attention to the tree and the Divine source of human life. In the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, humanity detaches the fruit from the tree. Humanity's concern for itself, whereby it sees the tree as a means of taking control of the fruit and of the world in which it lives, and of God as a means of securing its own narrow pleasure, produces a human race detached from God and a divided world. With the mitzvaof taking the *arba minim*, the fruit is rejoined to the tree and is used for a mitzvaand the service of God, rather than being detached from the tree and serving man's pleasure. Humanity rejoins the fruit to the tree, and itself to the world around it and to God Who reveals Himself in that world. Human beings may once again see the full expanse of life that God reveals to them, in which the invigorating waters, the trees and the fruits are all integrated with each other. They merit to live in this expanse, to be connected to it and to be an inseparable part of it. They merit delighting in the life that God gives them, and especially in the connection between them and God, Who once again reveals Himself to them in this life.

On Sukkot, the people of Israel stand before God and repair the sin of Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden, thereby experiencing in the commandments related to the holiday something of the taste of the Garden of Eden.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Three explanations appear in both the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi*, while two explanations appear in only one place, one in the *Yerushalmi*, the other in the *Bavli*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Gemara here refers to the unique phenomenon of the *etrog*. The young branches and leaves of the *etrog* tree have a delicate taste, similar to the taste of the *etrog* fruit. The *Yerushalmi* (*Kilayim* 5:7) brings a blessing that is recited over the eating of young branches of the *etrog* tree: "The *etrog*, even though one recites over it: 'Who creates the fruit of the tree,' over its young branches one recites: ‘Who creates the kinds of herbs.’" [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The *Bavli* records another similar reason: "When the small [new] fruit comes, the large [old] fruit is still [on the tree]." [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The fact that the *etrog* generally does not rot reveals life which does not have to rot, and which remains from year to year, though this is not explicitly stated in the text before us. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. With respect to its leaves as well, the *etrog* tree remains green all the time, and never loses all of its foliage. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Of course, the *etrog* tree is not eaten on a daily basis. It would be true to say that the Gemara recognizes its delicate flavor, which is similar to the taste of the *etrog* fruit, and it understands that the *etrog* partially reveals the original feature of the primordial tree, as it appears in the Garden of Eden, that the tree's woody part and its fruit are similar in taste. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Ramban (*Vayikra* 23:40) notes the connection between the *etrog* in the *arba minim* and the sin of Adam and Chava. He points out that "*etrog*" is the Aramaic word for *hadar,* as the same root is used to translate “*nechmad*” (to be desired) in *Bereishit* 2:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The *etrog* is subject to the law of *hadar*, as it is written: "fruit of a *hadar* tree," and an analogy is made between the *etrog* and the other species; thus, all *arba minim* are subject to the law of *hadar.* The *Bavli* explains that the disqualification of dryness (which disqualifies all *arba minim*, as is explicitly stated in the *mishnayot* at the beginning of the third chapter of *Sukka*) stems from the law of *hadar*. See *Sukka* 31a, where the Sages say that the *lulav* is likened to the *etrog*; according to most of the Rishonim*,* the other two species are likened to it as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Chazalsee a hint to this in the caper bush and its fruit:

   Rabban Gamliel sat and expounded: Trees are destined to yield fruit every day, as it is stated: “And it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit” (*Yechezkel* 17:23); just as the boughs [exist] every day, so shall there be fruit every day.

   However, a certain disciple scoffed at him, saying: But it is written: “There is no new thing at all under the sun” (*Kohelet* 1:9).

   He said to him: Come, and I will show you its equal in this world.

   He went out and showed him the caper bush. (*Shabbat* 30b) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)