

## HADASH #47

September 2005

### “SHAKE THAT THING:”

#### A LULAV EXPERIENCE

#### PROGRAMMATIC OPPORTUNITIES

There are three major Hagim (Festivals): Passover the Festival of Unleavened Bread; Shavuot as the Festival of the Harvest; Sukkot as the Festival of the Ingathering or the Festival of Booths (Tabernacles).

Three times a year - the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks and on the Feast of Booths - [shall appear in the Temple] and they shall not appear empty-handed. The people of Israel were commanded to assemble and hear the reading of the Torah every seventh year on Sukkot.

There are two major contemporary mitzvot for the Festival (Hag) of Sukkot: “dwelling in the Sukka” and “taking the four species” (Lulav and Etrog). Holding Lulav/Etrog and “shaking it” is both a Torah commandment and it is a wonderful, aesthetic and spiritual activity for all ages.

Concerning the Lulav/Etrog: the Torah commands us in Leviticus 23:40: “On the first day you shall take the product of the *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leaf trees and willows of the brook.” The Rabbis of the Talmud explained this to mean “On the first day [of Sukkot] you shall take the fruit of the *hadar* [the *Etrog* also known as the citron], branches of palm [the *Lulav*], boughs of leafy trees [*hadassim* or myrtle] and willows of the brook [*aravot*]. Because the palm is the dominant “branch” the entire combination of palm, myrtle and willow is known collectively as the Lulav and the blessing is to “. . . take the Lulav.”

#### I. LULAV/ETROG CORPS TO REACH EVERYONE WHO CANNOT BE IN SYNAGOGUE FOR THE MITZVAH OF SHAKING/BENCHING LULAV/ETROG

While it is not always possible to bring people who are shut-ins, infirm, homebound or elderly to a Sukka, every synagogue can create a Lulav/Etrog Mitzvah Corps to reach out, visit these folks in their residences and enable them to participate in the mitzva of Lulav/Etrog - the fundamental mitzvah of the “Four Species.

When you take a Lulav/Etrog set on your visit, the procedure is the same as in the synagogue. The blessing(s) are recited and then the Lulav/Etrog is “shaken.” Don’t hesitate to help in the recitation of the blessings - taken them in Hebrew, transliteration and English. You can also compose a short brochure from material in this handbook to leave with them about Lulav/Etrog, the Sukka and the Festival of Sukkot

### MOVE HALLEL TO END OF SERVICE FOR HOSHANOT / HAKAFOT

Many congregants - for various reasons - come to the synagogue too late to hear the explanation of the Lulav/Etrog and participate in the Hallel service. Since Hallel is a discrete liturgical unit, many Rabbis have moved their Hallel service to the conclusion of the service, just preceding the Hakafa (Lulav/Etrog procession).

This shift in the liturgy provides for first an explanation of “how to shake that thing,” a demonstration from the bimah, the recitation of the blessing(s) together accurately and then the actual waving of Lulav/Etrog. Thereafter Hallel is recited with the appropriate “shaking” of Lulav/Etrog as previously explained.

This may also increase the number of Lulav/Etrog sets that individuals purchase. At the same time, for several years the synagogue should purchase a number of Lulav/Etrog sets for people to use; once they become accustomed to the ritual and truly take pleasure in their participation, they will want at least one for their family - and they may even sponsor a “synagogue set” in gratitude for the opportunity.

Hakafot during the recitation of the Hoshanot begin on the left side of the bimah and conclude at the right side, because when the Hazzan turns to the congregation he begins with the Hakafa on his right. We don’t circle the bimah on Shabbat because we don’t take Lulav/Etrog in hand.

It is also a custom to bring out a Sefer Torah on to the bimah while reciting the Hoshanot and circling the bimah. Some say that it is a reminder of the circling of the ancient city of Jericho before it was destroyed.

### III. HOW TO “BENCH” AND WAVE THE LULAV/ETROG

“Bench” is a Yiddish word that means to recite a blessing (“berakha”). We recite the berakha “to take the Lulav” and then after the first time (generally the first day) reciting the appropriate berakha this year, we also recite “Shehehyanu (first day only).” The optimum time is in the service just before Hallel, although this mitzvah can be fulfilled in the morning as you enter the synagogue, at the conclusion of services and many hold that you can fulfill this mitzvah at any time during the entire day.

After the appropriate blessings are recited, then one “shakes” (wave=“na’anuim”) the

## Lulav and Etrog.

All three branches are held together in a woven “handle” made from a palm frond and consist of one palm long frond, two willow on the left and three myrtle on the right of the palm spine facing the person holding it in his/her right hand and the Etrog in the left hand. It is a custom to bind the Lulav with three “rings made from the palm; to bind the myrtle branches a tad higher than the willows because (1) it has a pleasing fragrance and (2) the myrtle precedes the willow in the Torah command; the palm should be at least four inches longer than the myrtle and willow. The Etrog is taken separately as the Torah does not connect it with the Lulav in the verse with a “vav” meaning “and” while the elements of the Lulav are connected to each other with the Hebrew letter meaning “and.”

After we “bench Lulav and Etrog” we then hold the Lulav in our right hand, myrtle to the right and willows to the left of us and “shake the Lulav.” We do this by keeping the Lulav vertical, move our hands holding Lulav and Etrog in a forward and backward motion (not bending it over and pointing to the ground!) and cause the tips of the leaves to shake a bit in the directions of East, South, West, North, Up and Down - as if a wind were blowing them. Maimonides suggests that one moves it, forward and vibrates the tip of the Lulav three times and then back and vibrates its tip three times.

In many synagogues a table is set up just as you enter the sanctuary on which there are sets of Lulav and Etrog, often with a siddur opened to the correct page to enable each worshipper who does not have his or her own Lulav/Etrog set to recite the blessings and fulfill the mitzvah before beginning the morning service.

Don't hesitate to provide several tables or a long table that more than one person may recite the blessings and fulfill the mitzvah at the same time. Provide instruction sheets that have not only the text from the siddur but also illustrations or pictures - today easily inserted into text from a digital photograph. Lastly, set up a rotation of mentors of all ages who will help everyone to recite the blessings.

The “Na'anuim” for Hallel occur as follows:

While reciting “Hodu La-Shem”

While reciting “Ana Hashem hoshi'ah na”

When reciting “Yomar na Yisrael.”

#### IV. MEANING OF THE “SHAKING” OF THE LULAV/ETROG

Some have suggested that this ancient ceremony is related to the ancient ritual ceremonies for rain in the time of the First and then the Second Temple. We want to encourage beneficial winds to bring us the weather that will provide the vital rains that water the ground and fill the cisterns and aquifers that will assure Israel of bountiful crops. These various rituals occur as we conclude the one cycle of agricultural ingathering of the crops - Pesah through Sukkot - and we pray for the coming year and

hope for the needs of our families in an agricultural society.

Others suggest that waving to the four directions of the compass is in honor of Him to whom the four directions belong, and up and down in acknowledgement of Him to whom heaven and earth belong.

In this fashion, each person who “benches” Lulav not only expresses hopes for a forthcoming New Year of health, blessing and prosperity for themselves and their individual family but they also express their solidarity with the Jewish People everywhere and the agricultural needs of the Land of Israel.

How important is the Lulav/Etrog in connecting us to the land of Israel? We are taught that in the days when the Second Temple still functioned the Lulav/Etrog were “taken” for seven days, while outside of Jerusalem in the provinces the Lulav/Etrog would be blessed and waved only for one day. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE by Rome, R. Yohanan ben Zakkai instituted the practice of “taking” the Lulav/Etrog everywhere that Jew lived in Palestine for seven days - and eight days in the Diaspora.

V. There are various suggested meanings for the “Four Species” even though they are a mitzvah without a real explanation.

Different human qualities: taste represents learning and smell represents good deeds. The Etrog has both taste and smell. The Lulav has taste but no fragrance. The myrtle has smell but no taste. The willow has neither smell nor taste. Some people have both learning and good deeds and some have one without the other while some have neither. The Jewish People is intended to be a People of all types of human beings, bound together and supporting one another; the deficiencies of one person are supplied by the other.

Another interpretation suggests that each element of the Lulav/Etrog represents a particular part of the human being through which s/he serves God: the Etrog is the heart, the place of understanding and wisdom; The Lulav is the spine corresponding to being people with a backbone and the talent of being upright; The myrtle refers to the eyes, and it suggests enlightenment; The willow represents the lips and the ability to offer the service of words in prayer we can emphasize the unity of the human personality.

These are four different kinds of plants that demonstrate that God helps all kinds of plants to grow.

These elements remind us of Sukkot as an agricultural Festival in contrast to the Sukka symbolizing the historical aspect of the Festival.

#### IV. TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLIDAY ELEMENTS OF THE LULAV AND ETROG

When encouraging people to acquire their own Lulav/Etrog set we can emphasize

how the various “elements” or parts of the set have their own use or role in Jewish ritual during the Jewish calendar cycle.

One can also conduct this portion of “teaching” as an open-ended question-and-answer session which is very often unusually creative and engaging. Just be sure to have at least one answer on the part of the leader - “just in case” no one has a suggestion.

The following have emerged over the years in my own congregational sessions:

Myrtle - used to make the spices for the Havdalah box; the myrtle twig without the leaves is a potential “reed pen” to write tefillin or mezuzot

Willow - used to make part of the Hoshanot for Hoshana Rabba; root the willow in water to be planted and provide kosher, fresh willows for yourself and the synagogue - remember that the willow for the Lulav are not “weeping willows” but a special species.

Lulav - used to (a) make a decoration for next year’s Sukka; (b) used to teach next year’s class about the waving of the Lulav; (c) often used to “sweep up” the hametz during b’dikat hametz and burn it the next morning; (d) teach people how to weave the palm strands into a binder or a ring - the original Jewish macrame.

Etrog - (a) etrog jam/jelly; (b) etrog liquor - use potato vodka and make it kosher for Pesah!; (c) some use it to provide an aroma in their closet or sock drawer; (d) some write the year in Hebrew and let it dry, collecting them year after year in a large glass vase.

The plastic bag holding the Lulav - (a) quiver for arrows on Lag B’Omer; (b) bag for fishing pole.

Etrog container - (a) Tzedaka box; (b) decorate it and use it to buy trees through Jewish National Fund.

Flax wrapping for the Etrog - (a) wicks for oil burning Hannukiyot; (b) beard or hair for Purim costume.

Etrog styrofoam now often used in place of the flax - cut it up and make Sukka decorations.

Lulav binder - paint the various strands different colors and save it for next Sukkot as a Sukka decoration.

Each element can be given out to children of various ages and save the peace in the family when the Hakafa or procession in the synagogue is conducted. It maximizes participation, involves the children with appropriate items to carry - the Etrog doesn’t lose it’s “pitom” or blossom end - and makes for greater joy on a holiday for which we are commanded to “you shall rejoice.”

The citron served several purposes after Sukkot, and according to papers found in the Cairo Ganizah it was also utilized to concoct a medicine. A belief prevailed that this prescription was especially potent for women who had difficulty in giving birth. Pregnant women would bite off the protuberance (pitma/pitom) of the Etrog on Hoshana Rabba, distribute charity to the poor and recite this prayer:

*“Lord of the universe, if one woman, Eve, Eve, tasted the apple, shall Your wrath fall on all women? If I had been in the Garden of Eden at that time I would not have listened to the snake and I would not tasted the apple. I did not eat and I did not reap the benefit of the Etrog during the seven days of Sukkot, as it was then ordained to fulfill a commandment. Even today, Hoshana Rabba, when the time is passed for the observance of the commandment, it is not my wish to enjoy its use. In the same manner, as I had only slight benefit of this pitma, so in the Garden of Eden I would have used the tree of knowledge that was forbidden to be eaten.”*

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