Vol. III. Issue 3
15 Tishrei 5780 /
October 15, 2019

LEHRHAUS Over Shabbos

CONTENTS:

SUKKOT

ANTIPODAL ETROGIM

AARON COHEN is a native of Detroit and has studied in Waterbury, Mir, and Ner Israel. He lives and works in Baltimore and enjoys Jewish and general history.

One of the more interesting questions revolving around Sukkot is a question first raised by R. Jacob Ettlinger (1798-1871) in his 1836 halakhic work *Bikkurei Ya'akov*.[1] R. Ettlinger was the rabbi of Altona and author of the well-known Talmud commentary *Arukh la-Ner* and *Responsa Binyan Tziyyon*, among other publications. He was staunchly Orthodox, vigorously anti-Reform, and an adherent of mysticism. At the same time, Ettlinger was a modern rabbi in many respects: he attended university; gave sermons in the vernacular; and recognized early on the advantages of periodicals and journals, editing his own, *Shomer Tziyyon ha-Ne'eman*, for ten years. It is all the more perplexing, then, that we find the following, seemingly anti-modern, discussion in his writings.

In *Sukkah* 45b, R. Shimon b. Yochai is quoted as saying, "All *mitzvot* must be performed in the manner in which they were grown." Though there is some debate as to which *mitzvot* this ruling applies, there is no doubt that the *arba minim* are included.[2] That is why, for example, in fulfilling the *mitzvah*, the *etrog* is taken with the *pitom* side up, as it grew on the tree. But, asks R. Ettlinger, what about a *lulav* or *etrog* that grew in far-away America or Australia? From the vantage point of his native Germany, it grew sideways or upside-down, as it were. Can such a item, which sprouted in the antipode of one's current location, be used for the *mitzvah*?

> I was uncertain if we, who live in Europe, can fulfill the obligation with *arba minim* grown in America and Australia, located to our side and bottom [of the Earth], and vice versa. We know what the scientists write: their feet are opposite our own; they are prevented from falling into space because God placed the force of gravity on the Earth. Thus, if we were to use the species grown there, they would [perhaps] be [considered] the reverse of the manner in which they grew, because from our perspective, the top of the *lulav* or *hadas* grew farther down than their bottom. Or perhaps since [the four species] are taken in the manner in which they grew in relation to the ground, this is called *derekh gedeilatan* [their natural manner of growth]. This [latter position] seems correct. (*Bikkurei Yaakov* 651:13)

R. Ettlinger concluded that it was reasonable to judge *derekh gedeilatan* not by the person, but by the growth of the *arba minim* in relation to the ground—which, of course, is the same all over the world—and *etrogim* grown anywhere would be therefore be valid.

But, as is often the case in halakhic discourse, the matter did not end there. Later authorities, as well as the burgeoning Hebrew press, picked up on R. Ettlinger's question. Fittingly, it was in "sideways" America where the discussion was picked up again.

America's first successful Jewish periodical was Isaac Leeser's *The Occident*, founded in 1843 in Philadelphia. In May 1847 the paper published an announcement by Rabbi Abraham Rice, which declared unequivocally that *etrogim* imported from the West Indies were kosher. This sparked a spirited discussion in the June issue, which featured a critique of Rabbi Rice by Menachem Goldsmith. Goldsmith countered that many of the Caribbean *etrogim* had been grafted with lemons, and therefore should not be assumed kosher unless sold by a trusted vendor or examined by a competent halakhic authority.

---

[1] On Ettlinger, see Judith Bleich, "Jacob Ettlinger, His Life and Works: The Emergence of Modern Orthodoxy in Germany" (Ph.D diss., New York University, 1974).

[2] Rashi, in his commentary to 45b, lists a number of these *mitzvot*, including *lulav*, *hadas*, and *aravah*, but omits *etrog*. Rabbi Shlomo of Vilna, in his *Binyan Shlomo* (1:48), took this as an indication that, according to Rashi, the requirement of *derekh gedeilatan* can be fulfilled with the *pitom* either way. When the *etrog* is first budding, the *pitom* faces upward, but as it matures, it weighs itself down and the *pitom* faces the ground. Rashi—unlike any other rabbinic authority—would view either direction as valid for the *mitzvah*.

Rabbi Nahman Kahana, in *Orhot Hayyim* 651:9 (quoted in *S'dei Hemed* 3:381), refutes this interpretation of Rashi in light of *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 5:2, where a parallel version of the statement in *Bavli Sukkah* 45b is recorded simply and unequivocally as "The four species of the *lulav* are taken in the manner in which they grew." Furthermore, it is clear from Rashi's halakhic works that this list is not exhaustive; in his *Sefer ha-Pardes* (p. 240), he rules that the boards of the *sukkah* must be *be-derekh gedeilatan*, and in his *Sefer ha-Orah* (p. 115) he mentions specifically that the *etrog* must be taken with the *pitom* up. This last work was only published in 1905; there was no way for the author of *Binyan Shlomo* to have seen it. Still, this misrepresentation of Rashi's view persists; surprisingly, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv interpreted Rashi this way in his recently printed lectures on *Sukkah* 45b.

In a brief editorial note, Isaac Leeser defended Rabbi Rice's original statement. Of course, he had never meant to permit grafted *etrogim*; the rabbi was simply refuting those who claim that all American *etrogim*, grafted or not, were unkosher. As Leeser put it, "An inspection does not help; the land of their growth is their blemish." If that were true, Leeser argued, the *mitzvah* of *arba minim* would be unfeasible for all Jews of the Western world. Certainly, he concludes, we may rely on the halakhic opinion of Rabbi Rice that West Indian *etrogim*—as long as they are purchased from reliable vendors and are not grafted—are kosher.

A clarification by Rabbi Rice, as well as Goldsmith's response to Leeser, appeared in *The Occident*'s next issue. Rabbi Rice, for his part, declared that all the signs of discerning an *etrog* from a lemon were unreliable. Rather, any *etrogim*, including those of the West Indies, were presumed to be kosher unless proven otherwise. Since most *etrogim* are not grafted, the Halakha, based on the majoritarian principle, would dictate that these *etrogim* are kosher for use.

In his reply to Leeser, Goldsmith wrote that he knew what Rabbi Rice had meant; he merely wished that it was understood by the rank and file of American Jewry, "most of whom are not *benei Torah*, and they will certainly misunderstand his words." He expressed surprise at Leeser's assertion that some say all Western *etrogim* are unfit. "I have never heard of anyone in this country say so, but I have seen a responsum of Rabbi Jacob Ettling[er] in which he wanted to forbid *etrogim* grown in America." Goldsmith summarizes Ettlinger's question, dismissing it out of hand. If American *etrogim* were invalid for Europeans, Goldsmith countered, European *etrogim* would, for the same reason, be invalid for Americans—and this was a possibility he could not take seriously.[3]

Below Rabbi Rice's and Goldsmith's Hebrew articles is another note by Leeser, in English, which effectively ended the discussion. He asked that any further comments on the matter be carried on in private correspondence. Yet some questions remain. Whom did Leeser have in mind when he referred to those who declared all American *etrogim*, grafted or not, blemished and unfit? Is this a misunderstanding of Rabbi Ettlinger's position? Or was it an unrelated stringency which viewed the citrons of the New World with suspicion, having had no tradition of *kashrut* throughout earlier generations? It is hard to say, and, as we shall see, the parameters of Rabbi Ettlinger's discussion were sometimes stretched beyond his original intentions.

Rabbi Ettlinger's query was an interesting point of discussion not only for halakhists; it also provided ammunition for critics of rabbinic authority. The *maskil* Yehudah Leib Gordon of Vilna (1830-1892) frequently used his brilliant poetic talents to ridicule the rabbinic leadership of his generation. The protagonist of his poem *Shenei Yosef ben Shimon* (c. 1880), a young, university-educated rabbi, dreams of modernizing Judaism, excising it of its later, unaesthetic accretions. He would permit *kitniyot* on Pesach, move the *bimah* to the front of *shul*, abolish the practice of spitting during *Aleinu*, and delay burying the dead. The same fictional hero also took an enlightened approach toward the *arba minim*: "*Lulavim* of America and its *etrogim*, he permitted them all / Despite being taken not as they grew / Their leaves in the ground and their roots in heaven."

In 1883, an article by Mordechai Jalomstein (1835-1897) appeared in *Ha-Meilitz*, a popular weekly *haskalah* newspaper. Jalomstein, a regular contributor, had immigrated to America in 1871, where he edited and wrote for a number of successful Yiddish and Hebrew papers. In this piece he sneeringly described how "our brothers," the Orthodox in America, reject the *etrogim* grown in California, despite their obvious superiority and affordability. Instead, they opted for *etrogim* from everywhere else—Genoa, Corfu, and Jerusalem.[4] Jalomstein criticizes the dishonesty of the vendors (perhaps also hinting at the naïveté of the masses), who would miraculously be able to procure even *etrogim* "grown from atop the grave of the *Tanna Kamma*." The Orthodox, he writes, were following the ruling of a certain disputatious rabbi, "the East Broadway *Maggid*," who had forbidden all American citrons. Jalomstein mockingly describes the flawed reasoning behind this ban: since America rests on the underside of the world, its fruits cannot be taken for the *mitzvah*. If an American *etrog* is taken with the *pitom* up, it does not fulfill the requirement of *derekh giddulo*; if it is taken *pitom* down, it is against the law codified in the *Shulkhan Aruh*.

This is essentially *Bikkurei Ya'akov*'s quandary, but applied, nonsensically, to the residents of America themselves. As Jalomstein presents it, the stringency is absurd. It seems incredible that a halakhic authority would come to such a conclusion. Whether or not Jalomstein is faithfully representing this rabbi's opinion, and though he never mentions his name, the "East Broadway *Maggid*" did, in fact, exist: his name was R. Yosef Moshe Aaronson (1805-1875), and he was indeed a respected yet quarrelsome Orthodox scholar. His book of responsa from his years in America, *Mata'ei Moshe*, does not appear to mention *etrogim* at all.

A number of weeks later, a paragraph by Shalom Pludermacher appeared in *Ha-Meilitz* entitled "Do Not Mock." It is a brief anecdote, simply referring the reader to our *Bikkurei Ya'akov*, which was never mentioned by Jalomstein. By showing a halakhic precedent for Rabbi Aaronson's stringency, Pludermacher seems to have been issuing a sort of defense of rabbinic integrity.

Pludermacher reprinted this article some years later in more detail. He described himself and a group of friends sitting around Rabbi Mattityahu Strashun's table one winter night.[5] The conversation turned to that day's newspaper article—it was November 26, 1883—written by Jalomstein. They began to joke about it, but when Rabbi Strashun heard, he quieted them. "My brothers, don't mock—I recall seeing a similar question in a book by one of the great [rabbis]."

[3] Goldsmith's response is puzzling for a number of reasons. First of all, *Bikkurei Ya'akov* is a commentary on the laws of *sukkah* and *arba minim* in *Shulhan Arukh*, not a book of responsa. Secondly, R. Ettlinger did not *want* to forbid; on the contrary, he concluded that the *arba minim* were permitted. Most perplexing of all is Goldsmith's refutation. He seems only to be restating what Ettlinger himself already asked: can *etrogim* grown in one hemisphere be used in the other? Are American *etrogim* kosher for Europe and are European *etrogim* kosher for America? It seems likely that Goldsmith was writing from memory and had forgotten the details of Ettlinger's question.

[4] J. D. Eisenstein, in his 1952 encyclopedia *Otzar Yisrael*, mentions the articles from *The Occident* and *Ha-Meilitz* but conflates the West Indian *etrogim* permitted by R. Rice in 1847 with the California *etrogim* discussed by Jalomstein in 1883. This, as well as a number of other sources, were brought to my attention via this thread: http://www.bhol.co.il/forums/topic.asp?topic_id=2497782&forum_id=19616

[5] For more on Strashun, see http://archive.li/8zfYu.

Immediately he got up and headed to his library, emerging with a copy of *Bikkurei Ya'akov*.

Yet, in truth, Rabbi Ettlinger's discussion and Rabbi Aaronson's ruling are not parallel. Rabbi Ettlinger would not have forbidden Americans from taking American *etrogim*, or Australians Australian *etrogim*. It is strange to think of Rabbi Mattisyahu Strashun missing this obvious difference, or of Pludermacher failing to point this out.

In 1891 Rabbi Hayyim Hizkiyah Medini began publishing his *magnum opus*, the encyclopedic, nine-volume *Sedei Hemed*. He twice mentions our *Bikkurei Ya'akov*, adding an interesting postscript: "One of the wise ones of our generation" had sent him the following question: if the world is round, how is there any top or bottom at all? Given what we know about the Earth, how does Rabbi Ettlinger's question make any sense? Rabbi Medini deftly avoids answering the question; he explains that he has never seen the *Bikkurei Ya'akov*, only quotations of it in secondary sources. Perhaps, he suggests, someone who has read it will be able to clarify.

Perhaps.

In the meantime, we ought to bear in mind Strashun's admonition. In surveying the history of thought and ideas, we should not judge our predecessors—certainly not the truly great personalities of the past—based on our current knowledge and experience. R. Ettlinger, modern and thorough thinker that he was, harnessed his own scientific knowledge while formulating halakhic decisions. In retrospect, the discussion may appear naive or backward, but R. Ettlinger was operating with what was current scientific thinking and deciding accordingly. What, after all, is the duty of a responsible *posek*, if not to apply the methodology of Halakha to the situations and exigencies of the day? Rather than painting R. Ettlinger as quaint or outdated, his comments in *Bikkurei Ya'akov* 651:13 cement his legacy as a broad modern thinker, a halakhist who applied all the knowledge at his disposal to arrive at an informed decision.

How Zionism Saved the Etrog in America

ZEV ELEFF is Chief Academic Officer of Hebrew Theological College and Associate Professor of Jewish History at Touro College and University System.

In 1866, *etrog* merchants failed to deliver citrons on time to thousands of Jews in the United States. From New York to Texas, Louisiana to Kansas, "congregations were sadly disappointed," opined one Jewish newspaperman at the time, "but not more so than the unfortunate importers, who, on the arrival of the steamer, received some splendid Corfu Esrogim, but, alas too late!"

The disappointment shared in the unhappy report indicates that many Jews in this so-called *Treifene Medine* had wished to observe the laws of Sukkot. Their plans, though, were stymied by the too-much-delayed delivery of the Greek *etrogim*. In fact, Jews in the United States had a long tradition—one that began with Shearith Israel in New York—of fundraising before Sukkot to ensure that anyone who wished could acquire the religious equipment to perform the holiday rituals.

Of course, America was not exactly the "*Goldene Medine*" either. By the 1870s, the *etrog* market was in steep decline. Mitzvah merchants—a terrific term coined by historian Annie Polland—like Hyman Sakolski continued to sell *etrogim* along with sacred books on Manhattan's Division Street. However, Sakolski made it clear that *etrogim* were no longer a profitable item. He sold them to ensure that the dwindling number of interested Jews could observe the holiday. Peddlers and shopkeepers no longer bothered to make the necessary international arrangements to import the sacred goods. Accordingly, the number of newspaper circulars advertising *etrogim* for purchase speedily decreased. One Jew from Cincinnati summed up the sentiments of his coreligionists this way:

> If you have no *Esrog*, no *Lulav*, etc., oranges, grapes, pears, and apples will do, not to be shaken, but to be gratefully enjoyed as God's blessing bestowed upon our beautiful land. Instead of shaking, send a nice basket of choice fruit to some poor family or families, and you have done quite well. Be glad, be blessed.

Overall, religious observance among America's Jews was at a nadir. It wasn't that most observant Jews had migrated toward Reform and abandoned traditional rituals. Usually, it was the case in the post-Civil War period that young Jews no longer looked to any form of Judaism. Sukkot, therefore, suffered along with Shabbat and other Jewish holidays. In September 1876, one Lower East Side merchant claimed with some exaggeration that he was the lone provider of *etrogim* left to Jews in the United States.

Then, something happened. In 1887, Rabbi Moshe Weinberger of New York reported that the "number of merchants selling *etrogim*" had "increased greatly in recent years, and the competition is now exceedingly great." Here are Rabbi Weinberger's observations found in his *Ha-Yehudim ve-Yahadut bi-New York*, translated into English many years ago by my teacher, Jonathan Sarna:

> This has brought with it a certain amount of good. In New York, any Jew can now easily observe these mitzvot in the strictest possible fashion, without worrying about spending more than he can afford. Only a few years ago, a poor man in New York could not buy a *lulav* and *etrog* of his own; even the most highly Orthodox had to observe the commandments with *etrogim* circulated around every morning by poor peddlers. Now it is hard to find any kosher traditional home without an *etrog* of its own. In many synagogues, especially the small ones, there are as many *etrogim* as worshippers.

What had happened? For one thing, the Jewish population in the United States spiked due to mass migration from Eastern Europe. In 1880, there were a quarter-million Jews living on American soil. By the turn of the century, that figure was closer to a million. The spike in interest in *etrogim* also had something to do with their new place of origin. For instance, the newspapers announced that Mr. J.H. Kantrowitz of 31 East Broadway had "imported from the Holy Land a choice lot of *Esrogim*. This is the first time that *Esrogim* grown in the Holy Land have been sold in this city, and Mr. Kantrowitz's enterprise deserves liberal patronage." Mr. Kantrowitz did quite well for himself, convincing others to arrange for *etrog* shipments from *Eretz Yisrael*, as well. In short order, American Jewry experienced a great spike in *etrog* sales—and, accordingly, *etrog* observance.

There is no requirement to use an *etrog* from *Eretz Yisrael*. Yet, the connection between observance and the Holy Land triggered

something powerful. Jews started to take a greater interest in the fruitful holiday of Sukkot. No doubt, they were moved by the news of the pioneering efforts to rebuild and replant the Holy Land. To them, support of *etrog* importation meant support for the Yishuv.

Mitzvah merchants still peddled some Corfu *etrogim*. However, Holy Land *etrogim* emerged as the citron of choice. Orthodox Jews in the United States, for example, were happy to learn in 1881 that the "Agricultural School of Jaffa produces excellent white wine, and this year a small number of *Esrogim* were among its products." Decades later, America's Jews also started to purchase imported *etrogim* from Petah-Tikva. The lesson learned here is that religious observance can, and oftentimes is—inspired by ancillary, if not altogether righteous causes. In the case of *etrogim*, Zionism was this great cause.

Among the Orthodox, Zionism was not a controversial item. In June 1898, the founders of the Orthodox Union spent hours deliberating whether to call their new organization "Orthodox," debating the pros and cons of such a nomenclature. However, the other plank decided at that inaugural meeting, on Zionism, required just minimal conversation and reached an overwhelming consensus in very short order. Likewise, the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim, established in 1902, was composed of much more religiously "rightwing" members compared to the Orthodox Union leadership. Yet, the Agudath Ha-Rabbonim agreed wholeheartedly with its Union counterparts.

The renewed prominence of the *etrog* in American Jewish life piqued the strange curiosity of Christian neighbors. In 1916, the editors of the *Country Gentleman*, the journal of record for the "farm, the garden and the fireside" in Philadelphia, told their readers about the "sacred Jewish citron" and the high prices paid for it by "Orthodox Hebrews." The magazine noted that while most are imported from Palestine to the United States, to the delight of agricultural opportunists that, owing to the ongoing Great War, "it is possible that the *etrog* might be profitably grown on a small scale in some of the citrus sections of Florida and California."

The plan did not work, but some still try. As of 2011, there was one 80-year-old *etrog* farmer who raises *etrogim* not too far from Sacramento. Aside from that, *etrog* yields from American soil are sparse if not non-existent. For more than a hundred years, Jewish bookstores and pop-up merchants in storefronts and residential basements urge their customers to purchase the slightly pricier Israeli *etrog* to support farmers in the Holy Land. Dutifully raised in a Religious Zionist home, I usually comply. It isn't that Californian or Floridian *etrogim* would be any less kosher. However, there is much to be said for the ever-increasing extra layers of meaning of the mitzvot we observe.

Are Modern Orthodox Jews More Comfortable with Mysticism or Anthropomorphism?

YAAKOV JAFFE serves as the rabbi of the Maimonides Kehillah and as the Dean of Judaic Studies at the Maimonides School.

Judaism focuses on the observances and commandments that govern our practice and religious expression, and often bypasseses—or looks past—questions of belief and faith. Still, questions of what Judaism really believes often stand directly behind our practices, and Jews take a stand about what our beliefs are through their regular *mitzvah* observance, and through their prayers.

Different groups of Jews place more energy on maintaining and projecting certain beliefs within Judaism than on other beliefs. This essay will examine how Modern Orthodox Jews feel about two beliefs that may or may not be parts of the Jewish faith: anthropomorphism—the attribution of human characteristics to the Creator; and mysticism—a feeling of imminence and narrowed distance between humanity and the Divine world; and how those Jews respond when faced with a choice to experience Judaism mystically or anthropomorphically.

Both mysticism and anthropomorphism come from the same point of departure: a desire to create a greater connection and a feeling of closeness with a distant, detached, perfect, and all-powerful Creator. Still, they arrive in two very different ways.

Anthropomorphism narrows the gap by describing, representing, and analogizing the Divine using human characteristics and human emotions, in order to enable a human being to associate and understand that distant God. The simple meaning of anthropomorphic texts are generally easy to understand, even if what they imply more broadly about theology can be more complicated and troubling.

In contrast, Jewish mysticism narrows the gap less by describing the Divine in simple terms, and more by describing a system or series of layers of Divine names, angels, emanations, and attributes which through their great complexity purport to provide understanding of that complex God, so long as one continues to study and probe the depths of these secret, obscure teachings. Here, the body of teaching that is Jewish mysticism is often obscure even at its initial stages, without even reaching the ultimate implication of those teachings.

Both of these approaches might be considered theologically problematic, especially for those whose Judaism is grounded in a Maimonidean-style rationalism. Rambam famously argued against both mysticism and anthropomorphism, and a pure rationalist would probably reject them both.[6] Yet, Jewish observance in general, and prayer in specific, becomes harder and harder when God is distant, unchanging, and unmoved. This has created a motivation for many Jews to embrace aspects of mysticism or anthropomorphism into their practice and prayer.

Before turning to the specific problem of the prayers of Sukkot, a brief historical sketch charts the role different prayer books in the United States have played in the development of this area of Jewish thought.

---

[6] A famous reply to a mystical teaching appears in Maimonides' *Laws of Mezuzah* (5:4): "but those who write the names of angels inside, or the names of Holy Ones, or verses or signatures, they are within the category of those that have no share in the world to come, for these fools—it is not enough for them that they have invalidated the *mitzvah*, but they even make this great *mitzvah* which is the Unity of God's name and his love and service as if it was an amulet for their own benefit." Maimonides' rejection of anthropomorphism and God possessing human characteristics appears in the first chapter of *Mishneh Torah*. The *Guide* goes to great lengths to read most scriptural passages that appear anthropomorphic in non-anthropomorphic ways, by using expanded or new translations for the words that appear in those prophecies.

The *ArtScroll Siddur*

Orthodox Jewish prayer in this country has been shaped and defined for the last few decades through the editorial decisions of the *ArtScroll Siddur*, which demonstrates much more comfort with mysticism than anthropomorphism. The most anthropomorphic long-section of the Bible is *Ketuvim*'s Shir Ha-shirim, which appears "translated" in the *ArtScroll Siddur*. Yet, these translations shy away from anthropomorphism on essentially every occasion, and provide only a hyper-metaphoric reading of the text, and not the underlying metaphor which captures the love between G-d and His nation.[7] Similarly, when the love song *Yedid Nefesh* appears, the words and translation follow the less controversial, and less anthropomorphic version.[8]

On the other hand, the *Siddur* is replete with mystical prayers. "*Ana Be-koach*"[9] appears prominently as part of the daily *Shacharit* prayers, the counting of the *Omer*, and "*Kabbalat Shabbat*," as do the mystical songs for the third meal of *Shabbat*. Numerous *mitzvot* appear in the *Siddur* along with mystical dedications before the performance of the *mitzvah*,[10] as do numerous prayers which are mystical in nature and invoke unusual names of G-d or of angels.[11]

A significant portion, if not a majority of American Jews, praying during the three decades beginning with the publishing of the first *ArtScroll Siddur* in 1984, would have become habituated to an experience of Jewish prayer that was heavy on mysticism, but reluctant and resistant in regard to anthropomorphism.

The *Sacks/Koren Siddur*

Besides a well-documented shift in focus around issues related to secular knowledge, Israel, and women's role in prayer, the recent *Koren Siddur* also brought with it a decided and focused shift away from mysticism in the prayer experience of the American, English-speaking, Orthodox synagogue-goer. Many of the mystical prayers appear in smaller print and without explanation and commentary, and are often preceded with the instruction "some say"—indicating that these mystical aspects of prayer constitute minority opinions within conventional Jewish prayer. The *Ushpizin* prayer is divorced from almost all of its original/mystical meaning, and is instead understood as strictly inviting historical Biblical figures as guests, nothing more.[12] The secret "Divine names" of the third prayer of *Birkat Kohanim* are also glossed over by the *Siddur* (736-37), left unexplained as if they were never there.

At the same time, the *Koren Siddur* is more comfortable with anthropomorphism. The alternative, anthropomorphic version of *Yedid Nefesh* appears in the siddur (40-41), along with *Anim Zemirot*. A literal translation of Shir Ha-Shirim appears, despite the anthropomorphic nature of the allegory (1108-17). Thus, a Jew today using this *Siddur* might conclude that an authentic prayer service may include more human descriptions of God, or of the humanity/God relationship, but that mystical pronouncement, divine *sefirot*, and names of angels might be judged improper or marginal parts of the prayer service.

When Forced to Chose

The prayers of Sukkot offer an interesting case to contrast between the two approaches, as we reach a prayer that can be understood either anthropomorphically, or mystically, but probably cannot be understood without one or the other, in a neutral/rational vein. The individual coming to pray may take one approach or the other, but must take one and is forced to chose which one he or she is more comfortable with.

The Mishnah in *Sukkah* (45a) relates that already in the times of the temple, a special and unusual prayer was recited while walking around the altar in the temple on the holiday of *Sukkot*. The four-word prayer was based on Tehilim 118:25, and ends with the two words "*Hosheyah Na*," "Save Now." The first two words of the prayer, used in the temple and still used today, spelled *Alef-Nun-Yud* and *Vav-Hey-Vav*, are more obscure. From context, we can deduce that they serve as an address or invocation to the Almighty, but what they mean and how they refer to God is far from clear.

As expected, Rashi's Talmud commentary strives to explain the two word phrase, and offers our first explanation of the phrase, in an explanation that is decidedly mystical in nature, and which understands this phrase through an analysis of secret Divine names. Firstly, Rashi notes that the numerical value of the six letters *Alef-Nun-Yud* and *Vav-Hey-Vav* equals 78, which corresponds to the words "Please God" which appeared in the original Psalm at 118:25. But, moreover, Rashi continues, each of these two words *Alef-Nun-Yud* and *Vav-Hey-Vav*, are actually in and of themselves secret three-letter names of God, derived through the positioning of the letters in Shemot 14:19-21.

This first, mystical explanation of the phrase carries with it an important implication for the translation of the phrase and the vowelization of the phrase. For Rashi, the two words should be translated in one of two ways, either "Please God" (what they numerically replace), or "God" (what the words mean), or perhaps should be left untranslated as "*A-Ni Va-Ho*." Furthermore, the second word should also likely be vowelized with a *holam* as the second vowel, much as the Tetragrammaton and the Divine Name of Mastery

---

[7] A literal translation of Shir Ha-Shirim might have posed two different problems to the translator: both the anthropomorphic descriptions of God, and also the detailed descriptions of love and affection which might trouble a more conservative audience. While we cannot know for certain which of these problems led Artscroll towards their translation, the cumulative effect is that an opportunity for describing the humanity/God relationship in human terms is removed from the *Siddur*. All references to the *ArtScroll Siddur* are to Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1984). Shir Ha-Shirim is found on pp. 298-307.

[8] In ArtScroll (590-91), God is asked to "*Ehov*," "Show Love," in the last line; but is not referred to as "*Ahuv*," "Beloved one", as He is in the other version. Despite this, however, *Anim Zemirot* still appears in standard form.

[9] A prayer with "profound mystical significance" (41). Which in their view "contains forty-two words, the initials of which form the secret forty-two letter name of God. Moreover, the six initials of each of its seven verses form Divine Names" (315).

[10] *Tzitzit/Talit* (4), *Tefillin* (4), Prayer (58), the Counting of the *Omer* (282-87), the *Lula*v (630), the *Sukkah* (720), and the beating of the *Aravot* (756).

[11] Including the third prayer during the *Birkat Kohanim* (698-701) and the *Ushpizin* prayer (720-21).

[12] See Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur for Shabbat and Hagim* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2015), 496-99. The change to the *Ushpizin* prayer is particularly striking, when one realizes that in its original origins, the *Ushpizin* prayer was designed to represent the seven *sefirot* of God. Yet, the option of arranging the *Ushpizin* around those *sefirot* is not recognized at all by the *Koren Siddur*.

are vowelized.[13] True to form, ArtScroll adopts the mystical understanding of Rashi, (735-36), supplying his interpretation in the commentary, with the corresponding vowelization and lack of translation.

Yet, other interpreters and commentators of the Mishnah and Talmud offer a second explanation of this special phrase, which leans more in the direction of anthropomorphism. In their view, the first word *Ani*, should be understood not as a mystical name, but as the standard Hebrew word, "I." The second word should be vowelized and translated also not as a mystical name *Va-Ho*, but as the standard Hebrew word "*Va-hu*," "And He." This second explanation, supported also by the spelling (*Vav-Hey-Vav-Alef*) and vowelization of the Kaufman Kodex (*Va-hu*) argues that God is invoked in this prayer through the use of two familiar pronouns "I and He."

Why would God be referred to not by name, but with a pronoun or two pronouns? In the words of Ritva:

> In the *Yerushalmi* they explained the matter, like the verse "I am with him in the painful situation," that even the Divine Presence is with us in exile, and will be with us in the salvation … Here too we say "Save us and *You*." And in my view, "He" [is used to refer to God instead of 'You'] in order to use the third person, in a manner of honor towards God.

In this explanation, the first pronoun "I" refers to the reader of the prayer, who asks that him or herself, "I," be saved. The second pronoun, the "He" who must be saved—is God himself, and thus this prayer strikingly beseeches God in anthropomorphic terms that He save Himself from being in exile.

The Tosafists begin with a partial agreement to Rashi, but in the end accept the Ritva, with the minor change that both the "I" and the "He" refer to God's need to save Himself, on the basis of Yechezkel 1:1 and Yirmiyahu 40:1. G-d is in exile, and in chains, and must Save Himself, now.[14] *Maimonides' Mishnah commentar*y also adopts the interpretation that this prayer uses two pronouns and refers to God's Own exile, and not a mystical incantation.[15]

This interpretation of the prayer is significant, in that it ascribes to God the human, mortal quality of being in exile, being limited from a particular space, and being in need of salvation. Clearly, one choosing to adopt a strict Maimonidean rationalism would find it difficult to pray that God be saved, and might prefer instead to understand this prayer as being two mystical names of God instead.

Here also, the *Koren Siddur* conforms with expectations (754-55). The word is vowelized "*Va-hu*" to match the pronoun, and the phrase is translated "I and He." For whatever reason, the word is still spelled *Vav-Hey-Vav* as spelled by Rashi, and not *Vav-Hey-Vav-Alef*, as spelled by Ritva and the Kaufman manuscript, but the translation and vowelization clearly indicate a preference for the anthropomorphic view and not the mystical one.

How Should a Modern Orthodox Jew Chose?

To the rational, modern Jew, both readings might seem problematic. We might be uncomfortable with the notion that there are two, new, *sui generis* Names of God which are unnecessary and hard to explain, used specially and uniquely in this one prayer. On the other hand, we might be equally uncomfortable with the idea that we pray for God to save Himself, as it were, from Himself being somehow limited or exiled. Yet, any Jew uttering this prayer must adopt one or the other reading, and—because of the unique pronunciation that corresponds to each view—is forced to intentionally select one and reject the other.

Modern Jews praying this Sukkot might be uncomfortable with having to chose, and with the philosophic implications of that choice. Yet, it is an important test-case to evaluate the twin doctrines of mysticism and anthropomorphism, their impact on our prayer book, and the implications for Jewish theology.

Surveying and researching how Modern Orthodox American Jews approach the prayer, and which of the two major approaches of the two major publishing houses dominates, will provide an important insight to the conventional theology of Judaism in this country today.

Does Peri Etz Hadar Mean Etrog?

DAVID MOSTER is the director of the Institute of Biblical Culture, an online learning community located at www.BiblicalCulture.org.

On the first day [of Sukkot] you shall take a *peri etz hadar*, palm fronds, branches of leafy trees, and river willows, and you shall be happy before the Lord your God for seven days. (Leviticus 23:40)

The verse above directs one to take a *peri etz hadar* on Sukkot. There is a consensus in Rabbinic literature that *peri etz hadar* refers to the etrog, but how do we get from the actual words *peri etz hadar* to the etrog? Although the question might seem straightforward, there are actually multiple approaches to this question, as seen in disagreements about how to translate this phrase. There are two keys to understanding these differences that will guide us as we analyze Rabbinic texts from different time periods, different

[13] This vowelization is also the standard one, found in the influential 1928 *Siddur Otzar Ha-tifelot* (Vilna: Romm), 10, and in an early American English Siddur- David de Sola Pool, *The Traditional Prayer Book* (New York: Behrman House, 1960), 523-24.

[14] The relationship between the first and third verses of Yechezkel has long troubled interpreters, since the third verse refers to the prophet by name, while the first says that it was actually "Ani" or "I" who was in exile. Rashi's interpretation of the verse is that Yechezkel 1:2-3 is an editor's interpolation to Yechezkel's first person narrative of the I, namely himself, in exile. [The words *Ruach Ha-Kodesh* in Rashi refer to the voice of the omniscient narrator, see Bereishit 37:22.] That Yechezkel was edited is clear from *Bava Batra* 15a. Yet, Tosafot's resolution to the problem is to argue that the "I" in exile was actually God, Himself.

[15] See Joseph Kapach, *Mishnah with Commentary of Maimonides* (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1963), 185. In Rambam's first explanation, the two words I and He are references to Devarim 32:29, and the phrase is taken non-anthropomorphically and non-mystically as "The I and He [of Devarim 32:29] please save [us] now." Yet, he still cites the view later espoused by Ritva in the name of the Geonim, but says that "this is in the manner of poetry [*melizah*]."

geographies, and different languages. I will offer my own interpretation at the end.

The first key is a grammatical ambiguity inherent to the phrase *peri etz hadar*. In Biblical Hebrew, there is no preposition corresponding to the English word "of." The of-relationship is expressed by juxtaposing two nouns in what is called a construct chain in English, or *semikhut* in Hebrew. For example, when "fruit" (*peri*) is juxtaposed with "womb" (*beten*) we get "fruit *of* the womb" (*peri beten*). In some instances, three nouns are juxtaposed, such as our own "fruit" (*peri*) + "tree" (*etz*) + "beauty" (*hadar*). The ambiguity is whether the third noun (*hadar*) is modifying the first noun (*peri*) or the second noun (*etz*). If *hadar* modifies *peri*, the fruit is meant to be beautiful ("beautiful fruit from a tree"). If *hadar* modifies *etz*, the tree is meant to be beautiful ("fruit from a beautiful tree"). A similar phenomenon, albeit backwards, occurs in the English phrase "big etrog tree." If the tree is meant to be big (a "big tree of etrogim"), one would expect a large tree with many etrogim on it. If the etrog is meant to be big (a "tree of big etrogim"), one would expect a tree with Yemenite etrogim, which can be larger than footballs and weigh more than ten pounds. Both scenarios match a "big etrog tree."

The second key to understanding *peri etz hadar* in Rabbinic texts regards a historical-halakhic matter. Some aspects of Jewish life are so ancient and well-established it is difficult to imagine them not being biblical. The etrog is one of these cases. Everyone agrees the words *peri etz hadar* refer to the etrog, but do the they literally *mean* etrog? In other words, is the etrog mentioned explicitly in the Torah or is the identity of the fruit known from a tradition passed down from Moses on Sinai? Those who are content with it being a tradition translate *hadar* according to its plain-sense meaning as "beauty" or "majesty," but those who are not content with it being a tradition translate it as "etrog." Translating *hadar* as "etrog" makes the fruit just as biblical as the Sabbath, Passover, Menorah, etc.

We are now ready to analyze each and every interpretation in light of (1) the grammatical ambiguity of "*hadar* tree" versus "*hadar* fruit" and (2) the historical/halakhic matter of Sinai tradition versus Torah law. We will use the grammatical ambiguity as a framework for organizing these interpretations.

I. Hadar Tree

This approach understands the tree to be *hadar* but not the fruit. The Bavli attributes the following interpretation to Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi, the redactor of the Mishnah:

Do not read the word *hadar* (beauty), rather read the word *ha-dir* (the animal pen). Just as an animal pen contains large and small ones, perfect and blemished, so too [the etrog tree has] large and small [fruit on it], perfect and blemished. (*Sukkah* 35a)

Rabbi Yehudah is pointing to a unique characteristic of the etrog tree, namely, the tree's year-round production of fruit. Most trees produce their fruit all at once, meaning all the fruits are roughly the same size as they mature. The etrog tree, which is continually producing new fruit, has large and small fruits at the same time. This is like an animal pen, which has large animals together with their offspring. The emphasis of *hadar/ha-dir* is not on the fruit but on the tree, which is the "animal pen." Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi's understanding is "fruit of the *hadar* tree," which he interprets midrashically to mean "fruit of the animal pen tree."

This approach can also be found in Targumim such as Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan, and the Targum fragments from the Cairo Genizah. In these texts, *peri etz hadar* is translated into Aramaic as "fruits of a praiseworthy tree, etrogim" (*peirei ilan mishabbah trugin*). The word "praiseworthy" (*mishabbah*), which is singular, must be modifying "tree" (*ilan*), which is also singular. It cannot be modifying "fruits" (*perei*), which is in the plural. For these Targumim, the tree is praiseworthy (*ilan mishabah*), not the fruit.

This approach was taken by a number of subsequent interpreters. Saadia Gaon (882 – 942) translated *peri etz hadar* into Judeo-Arabic as "fruit of the etrog tree" (*thamar shajar alatraj*). For Saadia Gaon, the etrog tree (*etz hadar*) is mentioned by name in the Torah itself. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) interpreted *etz hadar* as "a tree whose external appearance and unique features distinguish it above others, a tree of exceptional beauty." The tree is *hadar*, not the fruit. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffmann (1843 – 1921), who had a PhD in Near Eastern languages, wrote: "Therefore, beyond any doubt, [the Rabbis] had an accepted tradition that the 'beautiful tree' (*etz hadar*) is the tree which is called etrog in Aramaic." Again, the focus is on the tree. Rabbi Joseph Hertz (1872 – 1946), the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom from 1913-1946, took a tree-focused approach when he translated *peri etz hadar* as "fruit of goodly trees." In 1981, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (1934 – 1983) translated *peri etz hadar* as "fruit of the citron tree," and in 1996, the translators of the *Artscroll Tanach* did the same, translating *peri etz hadar* as the "fruit of a citron tree." For these last two translations, the etrog tree (*etz hadar*) is not merely a tradition but is literally mentioned in the Torah.

II. Hadar Fruit

The second approach understands the fruit to be *hadar* but not the tree. According to Targum Onkelos (ca. 2nd to 5th centuries), the translation of *peri etz hadar* is "the fruits of the tree, etrogim" (*perei ilana etrogin*). Here Onkelos translates *hadar* as etrog, meaning the etrog is sourced biblically and not in an oral tradition. He also separates the tree (*etz*) from *hadar* by translating *etz* in the determined state (*ilana*). This means *hadar* is not modifying tree (*etz*) but is in apposition to *peri*. This grammatical nuance means the fruits are *hadar* but not the tree. The translation of *peri etz hadar* is "the fruits of the tree, etrogim" (*peri ilana, etrogin*).

This *hadar*-fruit approach was attributed to Ben Azzai (2nd century):

Hadar means "the dweller" [*ha-dar*] on its tree all year round. (Sifra, *Emor* to Leviticus 23:40; cf. B. *Sukkah* 35a, Y. *Sukkah* 3:5)

Ben Azzai is pointing to the same botanical trait as Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi above, that the etrog fruit stays on its tree all year round. Whereas Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi focused on the tree, Ben Azzai focuses entirely on the fruit, which is "the dweller." Ben Azzai's understanding of *peri etz hadar* is "*hadar* fruit that comes from a tree," which he interprets midrashically to mean "the dweller fruit that comes from a tree."

Vayikra Rabbah takes a similar approach when it discusses the wisdom of King Solomon:

[Solomon] was perplexed by the four species, as it says, "three things are beyond me… four I cannot fathom" (Proverbs 30:18). The [four] things that [Solomon] wished to understand were the four species of

the lulav bundle. [He asked:] "*peri etz hadar*, who said that it is an etrog? All trees (*ilanot*) make beautiful fruit (*perot hadar*)!" (*Leviticus Rabbah* to 23:40)

By separating the "trees" (*ilanot*) from the "beautiful fruit" (*perot hadar*), this *midrash* is clarifying that the fruit is beautiful (*perot hadar*), not the tree. It also asserts that the plain-sense meaning of *peri etz hadar* has nothing to do with the etrog ("All trees make beautiful fruit!"). The etrog is associated with Leviticus 23:40 because of tradition alone.

More than a half millennium later, this approach would be taken by Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089 – 1167). According to Ibn Ezra,

We believe that the words of our sages do not contradict the words of the Bible… The sages passed down a tradition that *peri etz hadar* is the etrog, for in truth there is no tree-fruit (*peri etz*) more beautiful (*hadar*) than it.

Ibn Ezra introduces two ideas here. First, he clarifies that the etrog is a tradition as opposed to the plain-sense meaning of the biblical text. Second, by separating the word tree (*etz*) from the word beautiful (*hadar*), Ibn Ezra is disambiguating the original Hebrew. The tree-fruit (*peri etz*) is beautiful, not the tree itself. Ibn Ezra's translation would be "beautiful tree-fruit," or "beautiful fruit from a tree."

III. *Hadar* fruit and *hadar* tree

There is a group of commentators that did not choose between *hadar* fruit or *hadar* tree. For these commentators both were *hadar*. According to the Yerushalmi, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai (2nd century) took this approach.

"And you shall take for yourselves *peri etz hadar.*" This refers to a tree whose fruit is *hadar* and whose tree is *hadar*. 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. And what is this? This is the etrog. (*Yerushalmi Sukkah* 3:5)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai equates the fruit (*peri*) with its tree (*etz*) five times in this brief passage. Both the fruit and the tree are *hadar*. The syntax underlying this interpretation is "*hadar* fruit from a *hadar* tree" (*peri hadar* from an *etz hadar*).

Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, 1194 – 1270) took a similar approach by translating *hadar* as etrog*.*

It appears to me that the tree called etrog in Aramaic is called *hadar* in Hebrew… the tree and the fruit are called by the same name, as is the custom with the majority of fruits such as the fig, the nut, the pomegranate, the olive, etc., and so both the tree and the fruit are called etrog in Aramaic and *hadar* in Hebrew.

As a proper noun meaning etrog, *hadar* has the ability to modify both the tree, which is called *hadar*, and the fruit*,* which is called *hadar*. Ramban's interpretation is "*hadar* fruit from a *hadar* tree," or better, "etrog fruit from an etrog tree." Like Targum Onkelos and Saadia Gaon, Ramban views the etrog identification as Scriptural as opposed to being a tradition from Sinai. As mentioned above, this approach was also taken by the much later Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan and the translators of the *Artscroll Tanach*.

IV. Conclusion

Two decisions are implicitly made in every Rabbinic interpretation of *peri etz hadar*. The first is whether the fruit is *hadar*, the tree is *hadar*, or if both are *hadar*. The second is whether the identification of *hadar* as the etrog stems from an oral tradition from Sinai or whether it is explicit in the biblical text. If it is an oral tradition, then *hadar* means "beauty," but if it is explicit in the text, then *hadar* means "etrog."

How would I interpret *peri etz hadar*? Like Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra. That is, the etrog is a Rabbinic tradition and *peri etz hadar* means "beautiful fruit (*peri hadar*) from a tree (*etz*)," or "tree-fruit (*peri etz*) that is beautiful (*hadar*)." These two translations, which are identical in meaning, emphasize that the fruit is beautiful, not the tree. Although Ibn Ezra never mentioned it, there is evidence for translating this way. The phrase *peri etz* exists individually in Biblical Hebrew and means "tree-fruit." Tree-fruit is mentioned on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1:29), in the Egyptian plague of locusts (Exodus 10:15), in the laws of tithes (Leviticus 27:3), and in one of Ezekiel's prophecies (Ezekiel 36:30). The very similar phrase *peri kol etz*, which means "all tree-fruit," is attested to twice, in Nehemiah 10:36 and 10:38. Thus, *peri etz* "tree-fruit" is a unique and individual phrase.

Why is this important? There is another phrase that can shed light on our ambiguity. The term *nega tzara'at*, "leprosy affliction," is a unique phrase that appears by itself thirteen times in the Bible. When a third noun is added, such as *beged* /garment in Leviticus 13:59, we arrive at the same ambiguity as *peri etz hadar*. Does *beged* modify *nega* or does it modify *tzara'at*? Luckily, another verse, Leviticus 13:47, disambiguates for us: "a garment (*beged*) that has a leprosy affliction (*nega tzara'at*)." The phrase *nega tzara'at* stays intact. There are other examples of this phenomenon (e.g., *shemen-mishhat kodesh* and *berit-melah olam*), but what is important for us is that *peri etz* "tree-fruit" is to remain intact. The interpretation is "beautiful fruit (*peri hadar*) from a tree (*etz*)," which can also be written as "tree-fruit (*peri etz*) that is beautiful (*hadar*)." The tree-fruit is beautiful, not the tree itself.

This grammatical interpretation is bolstered by the context of Leviticus 23, which ties the annual festivals to the agricultural cycle. The *omer* ritual marks the beginning of the barley harvest at Passover time; the two loaves are offered on Shavuot to commemorate the end of the wheat harvest; and Leviticus 23 even contains harvesting laws such as *peah*, "the corner," and *leket*, "gleanings" (v. 22). Sukkot is also tied to agriculture, taking place "when you have gathered in the bounty of your land" (v. 39). The holiday is elsewhere called the "festival of ingathering" (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). What "bounty" was "gathered in" during the seventh Hebrew month, which correlates to our September and October? Tree-fruit. At the time of Sukkot, the grapes, figs, dates, and pomegranates were either ripe for harvest or already harvested, and the olive harvest was just beginning. These ripe tree-fruits were most likely the *peri etz hadar* of Leviticus 23:40. While this interpretation is what I consider the plain-sense meaning of the text (*pshat*), an ancient tradition says otherwise. As Ibn Ezra put it, "The sages passed down a tradition that *peri etz hadar* is the etrog, for in truth there is no tree-fruit (*peri etz*) more beautiful (*hadar*) than it."

The Species For Change

CHANA CHAVA FORD is an English and Jewish History teacher at Beth Jacob of Denver High School.

There is much to say regarding the symbolism of the *arbah minim*, the four species that we take and shake over the seven days of Sukkot. The usual trope offers metaphors for our bodies and nation; The etrog is a heart and the *lulav* a spine. These symbols, it is usually told and quoted from rabbinic sources, reflect Jewish peoplehood.

There's something more to be said, though. To my mind, the *arbah minim* provide a roadmap for change. In the mid-twentieth century, Eliyahu Kitov cited four characteristics which would render all of the species unfit for use, regardless if the min is a *lulav*, *hadas*, *etrog*, or *aravah*. When examined, these flaws turn into guides that can help us reach our potential as we enter into a new year.

Grafting

None of the *minim* can be grafted. At first blush, this rule is counterintuitive, given the pervasive theme of unity found in Judaism. Wouldn't it, in light of the constant call for *hadus*, make sense to join two plants to make a greater one?

However, that is not what unity is about. Unity is standing together while remaining unique. Homogeneity does not a stronger nation make. If we graft, we may have made something new, perhaps even something that is empirically *stronger*—but we have not made something *better*.

There is a tradition that each of the species represents a different kind of Jew (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12). By bringing them together, we send a message that all Jews—regardless of knowledge and deeds—belong with one another. But we do not chop up the *minim* and put them in a blender before shaking; we keep them whole and singular, stating publicly that each individual brings something important and special to our national table.

You are important. You are valuable. You are necessary. But you are only these things when you are yourself. When you allow yourself to be lost in a crowd, when you give up individuality for conformity, there may be some gains, but the loss is incalculable, both to yourself and to that same crowd.

Theft

One might be tempted to argue, however, that while individuality is all well and good, not everyone is blessed with traits that will make them stand out and be special. "I'm not as talented/intelligent/righteous as other people," they might say. "I need to latch onto another; because they have the traits I need to succeed." The *minim* have something to say on that as well: none of the species can be stolen.

The root of robbery is a lack of *bitahon* (*Shaarei Kedushah* 2:4). A person who robs believes that God messed up; they were meant to have something and God is unable to provide it for them. If a person believed truly that Hashem provides them with all the tools they need—be those tools money, intellect, family connections, etc.—they would not steal. After all, if they were meant to have it, they would get it. In order to fulfill our life missions, we must recognize our own strengths and merits, believing that we already are a complete package—all that's left is for us is to assemble ourselves.

Decapitation

The next defect is a broken or cut off head/tip. This disqualifies all four, not just the *etrog*. What message can we glean from here?

Often, when it comes to development, the mantra is *follow your heart*. While emotions are important—after all, it is hard to love and fear Hashem without feelings—it is crucial that we do not forget our heads as well. Sermons and *shiurim* regularly speak of the eleventh commandment given at Sinai, "And Thou shalt use common sense." When we are dealing with the change that growth can bring, our hearts are especially vulnerable to confusion. We get caught in the swirling grey areas, and can become paralyzed by conflicting emotions. It is at these crossroads when our heads, used cooly, can lead us out of the desert into the promised land.

Physiologically, we need our heads. Though science has found ways to temporarily keep a body going without a heart, it has yet to do the same for our heads. The brain, and it's connection to every part of our bodies, is vital, and as long as it is sound we can continue to live and grow. Our minds have great power, provided we use them. As evidenced by Jean-Dominique Bauby in his memoir, The *Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, even if the rest of the body has shut down, if the head is active, a person still has the ability to advance to new levels of understanding and appreciation.

Desiccation

The final quality that can negate all four species is the most fundamental: they need to be alive. If any of them are too dried out, then they are unfit for use. We, too, must be alive—physically and spiritually—in order to grow. The *minim* that lack water are *pasul*; *Bava Kama* (82a) states that water is a metaphor for Torah: *eyn mayim ela Torah*. Just as plants need moisture to grow, people require ways to connect with spirituality in order to thrive. Spirituality is what feeds creative energy.

Additionally, we need to be active. No arm-chair-philosophy for us: one of the distinctive traits of living creatures is the ability to move in some way. Whether it be a fern reaching towards the sun or a fox pawing at the dirt, life demands motion.

In the language of the four species, how do we prove we are alive?

We shake. We shake left, we shake right, we shake forward and even back. We dance around in chaotic movement. It is messy: so is change. Growth will always include setbacks, and rarely is it clear all at once. But there's one last thing that will invalidate our shaking the *lulav*. The Rama ruled (*Or Ha-Hayyim* 651:9) that it is incorrect to shake with the point downwards. The *minim* must aim toward the sky. Because it doesn't matter if you're all over the place right now; if you're heading upward, bent on making progress, you will get there eventually.