

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

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

“And you shall take for yourselves, on the first day, a beautiful tree fruit, date palm fronds, and boughs of leafy trees and of brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your Lord, seven days.” (Vayikra 23:40).

What are the four species the Torah instructs a person to take and what is the reason why the Torah chose those four species. Also, why did one have to “take” (purchase) them?

In this pasuk, two species are specifically identified and two are hinted at. *Pri eitz hadar* translates loosely to “beautiful tree fruit.” It also speaks of the bough of a leafy tree. The two others, the brook willow and the date palm are easily identified. What are the first two and why these four?

These instructions were given to Bnei Yisroel while they were still in the wilderness. There were likely no esrogim in Egypt or in the wilderness. They are not likely even native to Eretz Yisroel. They originated in the Himalayan foothills and northeast of what is now India. They were brought to the region by traders and later by those that returned from Bavel. The Torah had to identify them.

What does “hadar” mean? In the Torah it says, “Rise before the aged and (v’hadarta) honor the old.” (Vayikra 19:30). Also, בְּלוֹר שׂוֹרֵי הַדָּר לֹא “The firstborn of his bulls, shall (hadar) glorify him.” (Devarim 33:17). However, in context these makes little sense. The Torah says honor the face of the old. The pasuk can mean “Before old age get up, and you shall be lengthy in the face (in front) of the wise.” Do not dally your youth away, learn from the old and the wise. Further, the brocho Moshe gave to Yosef is one of kingship. (Ibid 33:16). It can also translate as “His straight progeniture shall outlast him for generations.” This is a blessing that Yosef’s kingship would endure for generations. Yosef’s second born son but the one that Yaakov blessed with the birthright – Ephraim – ended up having generations of kings for about four hundred years. Thus, hadar, means to last a long time. It can also mean poor. (Shmos 23:3 and Vayikra 19:15). In Tehillim, written for King Dovid, it asks, what is man that Hashem should recall him or consider him? וְתַחַסְרָהוּ מְעַט מְאֻלְתָּהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהִדָּר תַּעֲטָרְהוּ: “And he falls short and is less than Lordliness, and he is crowned with honor and “hadar” – longevity. (Tehillim 8:6). The next pasuk says, “He is made master over the work of Your hand, everything was laid under his feet.” (Ibid 8:7). This means that man is falling short of what Hashem created him for. This harkens back to “And the Lord says, ‘Let us make mankind in our image...that he shall rule over creation’ ...and the Lord blessed mankind to be fruitful and fill the earth.” (Bereishis 1:26,28). Man was supposed to godly, rule over Creation, and last long in this world; but he is falling short. Thus, hadar means length of days.

The special tree fruit is one that can last a long time and it increases its beauty and taste with time. Most fruits get overripe and spoil the longer they are on the tree. Most fruits only last a few days off the tree. The esrog lasts a long time off the tree and the longer it is on the tree, the softer and sweeter it gets. Esav had a descendant "Hadar" that may have had territory to the east. (Ibid 36:39). This might be "the tree fruit of Hadar."

Dates grow with one frond at the top that has all its leaves together. Then over time the fronds spread out. The "leafy" tree is harder to explain. When once again making succos in Eretz Yisroel, the people gathered "branches of olive trees, and oil trees, and myrtle trees, and date trees, and of leafy trees, to make succos." (Nechemiah 8:15). How can "leafy tree branches" be myrtle if that pasuk says myrtle and also leafy tree? This is because all of them are "leafy tree branches." The one to be taken cannot be the date, that is already mentioned, specifically. It is not likely the olive trees as those branches are very similar to the brook willow leaves. Further, the Torah says the eifod (shoulder pieces of the kohen gadol's vestments) was made "like corded work." (Shmos 28:14, 22; 39:15). It means chain links. (Ibid 28:24, 25; 39:17,18; and Yehoshua 15:13). Unlike the elongated leaves of the willow and olive trees, the myrtle tree leaves are round like links in a chain. It is the myrtle tree.

These four each represent something different. The esrog's best feature is not its taste but its appearance and its longevity. The date is ugly but very sweet. The myrtle berry has a very astringent and herbal taste and they look pretty. Willow berries have medicinal properties, are pretty, and have a tart taste. Both the esrog and the myrtle berry need to be cooked before eating and the date and the willow berries can be eaten raw. The esrog tree is short, the date palm tall, the willow tall but its leaves hang down, the myrtle the branches face upward. This represents how different people can be. Some people are affable and their goodness is shown immediately. Others, it takes time to get to know them but their benefits can be discovered. Some are sweet and some are strong, some wither at adversity, and some thrive in it. Some do a job and disappear while others do little but are always around.

The palm leaf is reminiscent of the spine, straight but fragile. When its leaves open up it looks like the rib cage. The esrog, the only fruit taken in it of itself, looks like the heart. It is hard and rigid, but with much cooking it becomes soft and sweet. A person should not be hard-hearted, but should know that love and kindness can come over time. The myrtle leaf is chainlike. It can be used to lock someone up (as in Yehoshua) or it can be used to secure two precious stones. No person can be by himself. He is one link in the chain of Klal Yisroel. The willow branch hangs down because one cannot just look at himself, but he has to look above to find the help he seeks. The leaves come in pairs and they look like mouths. It takes two to converse.

Further, all four grow in different places. The esrog on the mountains, the palm in the plains; the myrtle needs lots of sunlight, and the willow grows along the river in very humid areas. Thus, one has to "purchase" them. Taken together, they all symbolize that everyone in klal Yisroel has different personalities and strengths. However, in order to be one organization everyone must come together, rely on each other, and every type is required to be part of the group. All types have their day and need each other.