



## וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, פְּרֵי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים, וְעֵנֶף עֵץ-עֵבֶת, וְעַרְבֵי-נָחַל

“On the first day, you shall take the product of *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook...” (Vayikra 23:40)

It is interesting to note that despite the Biblical origin of the commandment, we don't use the words found in the verse. Let's look at how the words have changed.

The verse says we should “take” the Four Species, using the verb לקח. However, the blessing we say is על נטילת לולב, using the verb נטל. Why did the Rabbis change the verb?

The linguist Yechezkel Kutscher offers the following answer (which he heard from a high school student of his, who we now know as the famous Rabbi Mordechai Breuer): while in Biblical Hebrew לקח meant “to take,” by the time the Rabbis coined the blessing, the verb meant only “to buy.” And the *halacha* is that one need not buy the *lulav* – it can come from *hefker* (i.e. have no previous owner) or be received as a gift. So נטילה was substituted, which only meant “taking.”

The first species mentioned is פרי עץ הדור, which we today call an אטרנג. The word *etrog* is of Persian origin, where it was known as *turung*. A related word in Persian is *naranga*, meaning “fragrant fruit.” This word eventually made its way to English as the word “orange.” The original form of the word is hinted at in a story in Kiddushin 70a, describing a dialogue between Rav Nachman and Rav Yehuda. Rav Nachman insisted on using fancier words, instead of the

more commonly used ones. A number of examples of such speech are given. In one case, Rav Nachman used the word *etronga*. Rav Yehuda said calling it an *etronga* is a sign of snobbery, and it should be called either *etrog* or the Aramaic *etroga*. While the use of *etrog* is universal today, Rav Nachman's *etronga* was closer to the Persian *turung*.<sup>1</sup>

The second species listed is כפת תמרים – “branches of palm trees.” We refer to the palm branch with the post-biblical word לולב. In Rabbinic Hebrew, *lulav* can also mean the more general “shoots, sprouts,” and derives from the root ללב as in Yoma 81b, where it says “the grapevine shoots [*lulavim*] sprouted [*livlevu*].” The root ללב is parallel to the Biblical נצה, both meaning “to blossom.”<sup>2</sup> Both of these roots are related to words meaning “to shine, to burn” (לבה and נצץ) since the blossoming of a plant radiates like the shine of a fire.

The third species is the “boughs of leafy trees [עץ-עבת].” We refer to this species as הדסים. Unlike the previous two species, *hadas* is a Biblical word, appearing in the books of Yeshayahu, Zechariah, and Nechemiah. The verse in Nechemiah is interesting because it mentions both *etz avot* and *hadas*. Ezra tells the people to study the Torah, and the people find the laws of Sukkot. They then order that throughout the Land everyone must.

צאו ההר והביאו עלי-זית ועלי-עץ שמון ועלי הדס ועלי תמרים ועלי עץ עבת לעשות סכת ככתוב.

“... go out to the mountains and bring leafy branches of olive trees, pine trees, myrtles [*hadas*], palms and [other] leafy trees [*etz avot*] to make booths, as it is written” (Nechemiah 8:15).

The Rabbis<sup>3</sup> say that these are referring to two different kinds of myrtle branches. The *hadas* mentioned in this verse is referring to a “wild” type of myrtle, which is appropriate for the roof of the *sukkah*, and the *etz avot* is our *hadas*, which is used for the Four Species.

The fourth species mentioned is the “willows of the brook” – ערבי-נחל. The Talmud (Sukkah 33b) says while the verse is referring to willows that grow by the brook, any willow branches are acceptable for fulfilling the commandment. The word appears five times in the Bible, always in the plural form – *aravim*. The singular *arava* first appears in the Mishnah, which also refers to the plural as *aravot* (as we do today). Why not the Biblical *aravim*?

This may be part of a trend where words that appeared in Biblical Hebrew with the suffix *-im*, have the suffix *-ot* in Rabbinic Hebrew.

1 In the Jerusalem Talmud, Gittin 12a, the word *turunga* itself is used for *etrog*.

2 See Bereshit 40:10 and Targum Onkelos on that verse.

3 See Sukkah 12a and 32b.

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