

Four Species and People

We are taught in a midrash: "The fruit of a beautiful tree" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this citron (etrog), which has taste and has smell, so too Israel has among them people that have Torah and have good deeds. "The branches of a date palm" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this date, which has taste and has no smell, so too Israel has among them those that have Torah but do not have good deeds. "And a branch of a braided tree (a myrtle)" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this myrtle, which has smell and has no taste, so too Israel has among them those that have good deeds but do not have Torah. "And brook willows" - these are [referring to] Israel. Just like this willow, which has no smell and has no taste, so too Israel has among them people that have no Torah and have no good deeds. And what does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? To destroy them is impossible, but rather the Holy One, blessed be He, said "bind them all together [into] one grouping and these will atone for those." (Vayikra Raba 30:12)

The Mishna on Sukkah 29b rules that a "lulav...that is completely dry is unfit.." The Mishna on 32b rules "that a myrtle branch...that is completely dry is unfit." The "willow that is completely dry is unfit." (m. Sukka 33b) Finally, the Mishnah on 34b rules similarly for an etrog.

The myrtle and willow of our *lulavim* bundles seem to dry up the most quickly: We are told to keep them in the refrigerator, and or sprinkle them with water periodically on *Hol HaMoed*. They also are apparently the most fragile, even though the etrog pitom is exposed, too. The lulav (palm) itself seems to take a bit of work to dry, even in our hot-ish climate. And the etrog itself seems to take quite a while.

The midrash in Vayikra Raba 30 appears to be telling us, in part, that the myrtle and willow represent people of Israel that lack in "Torah" or are lacking both good deeds and "Torah". They "dry out" quickly with this lack of "life-force", and – from the Mishna – render the entire bunch unfit for the holiday. The midrash seems to respond that it's our duty if we have both "Torah" and good deeds, to strengthen our bonds as Jews by ensuring that even those of us without a constant stream of good deeds or Torah are worthy of our nationhood. We must ensure that our Torah and good deeds are also conveyed with *Derekh Eretz*, maybe even in smaller bunches, and in full recognition that they have worth and are a part of our band. Torah is often compared to water, and the traditional Psalms for the seven days of Sukkot are 42 and 43, that begin "As the hind pants after the stream, so does my soul for the Lord".

-Daniel Alhadeff