LULAV AND ETROG: THE FOUR SPECIES
What they are and what to do with them

INTRODUCTION

The commandment regarding the four species (of the lulav and etrog) is found in the Torah. After discussing the week-long Sukkot festival, specific instructions for how to celebrate the holiday are given. Leviticus 23:40 instructs:

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶּם בַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַפֹּת תְמָרִים וַעֲנַף עֵץ־עָבֹּת וְעַרְבֵּי־נָחַל

וּשְמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶּּם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים

"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, and you shall rejoice before Adonai your God seven days."

These are the four species that form the lulav and etrog. The four species are waved in the synagogue as part of the service during the holiday of Sukkot. Traditionally, they are not waved on Shabbat because bringing these items to the synagogue would violate the prohibition against carrying. Some liberal synagogues do wave the lulav and etrog on Shabbat. While it is customary for each individual to have a lulav and etrog, many synagogues leave some sets in the synagogue sukkah for the use of their members. The lulav and etrog may also be waved at home.

Below you will find some basic information about the lulav and etrog, reprinted with permission from The Jewish Catalogue: A Do-It-Yourself Kit, edited by Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld, published by the Jewish Publication Society.

HOW THE FOUR PARTS FIT TOGETHER

The lulav is a single palm branch and occupies the central position in the grouping. It comes with a holder-like contraption (made from its own leaves) which has two extensions. With the backbone (the solid spine) of the lulav facing you and this holder in place near the bottom, two willow branches are placed in the left extension and three myrtle branches are placed in the right. The myrtle should extend to a greater height than the willows.

This whole cluster is held in the right hand, the etrog is held in the left, and the two should be touching one another. Some have the custom of picking up the etrog first and then the lulav--reversing the order when putting them down--because the etrog is referred to before the others in the biblical verse.
WAVING THE LULAV

It is a mitzvah to wave the lulav on each of the first seven days of Sukkot. The proper time is in the morning -- either before the Morning service or during the service immediately before the Hallel. A meditation (found in the Siddur) is recited prior to the blessing (this has many kabbalistic secrets concealed within it). The blessing is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ מֶֶּֽלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶּׁר קִדְשֶָֽׁנוּ בְמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוֶָּֽנוּ עַל נְטִילַת לוּלָב.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al n'tilat lulav.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who has sanctified us with commandments and has commanded us concerning the waving of the lulav.

On the first day of waving add:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵֽינוּ מֶֶּֽלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶּׁהֶּחֱיֶָֽנוּ וְקִיְּמֶָֽנוּ וְהִגִיעֶָֽנוּ לַזְמַן הַזֶּה.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam
Shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu lazman hazeh

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who has granted us life, sustenance, and permitted us to reach this season.

Before the blessing, the etrog is held with its **pitom** (stemlike protrusion) pointed downward. After the blessing, it is inverted so that the **pitom** faces up. At this point you wave/shake the lulav (together with the other three) in the following manner:
1. Stand facing east.

2. Hold the lulav out to the east (in front of you) and shake it three times. Each time the motion of shaking should be a drawing in to you--reach and draw in, reach out and draw in, reach out and draw in.

3. Repeat the same motion three times to your right (south), behind over your shoulder (west), to your left (north), raising it up above you, lowering it down below you.

4. All of these should be done slowly and deliberately--concentrating the symbolisms and intentions of the act. The lulav is also waved during Hallel while saying the verse

חָיָה לְהָדוּ, כִּי טוֹב, כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדוֹ.

Hodu l’Adonai ki tov, ki l’olam chasdo

Give thanks to God, for God is good, for God’s lovingkindness endures forever.

5. The lulav is again waved while saying:

יָמָר נָא יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדוֹ.

Yomar Na Yisrael, ki l’olam chasdo

Let Israel say that God’s lovingkindness endures forever.
6. And it is waved again while saying:

אָנָא ה' הושיע נָא.
Ana Adonai Hoshiah Nah

We implore You, O god, save us!

آنָ נָה (A-na) – [Shake front/East on first syllable, shake right/South on second syllable]

אַד神经系统 (Adonai) – again, never shake when saying God’s name (we don’t want to imply God is in only one particular direction)

הוֹשִֶֽׁיעָה (Ho-shi-ah) -- [Shake back/West first syllable, shake left/North second syllable, shake up last syllable]

נָה (Na) - shake down