

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

PARDES AND THE FOUR SPECIES

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Dear Friends,

I hope you had a meaningful High Holidays and that you are now reading to go full tilt into the joy of Sukkot. Instead of straight out Talmud study, I thought we might do something a bit more mystical this time. So below you'll find four different ways of looking at Sukkot. Enjoy!

Peshat (The Simple Meaning)

And you shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees: branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.
(Leviticus 23:40)

Remez (The Level of Hints and Numerology)

pri eits hadar (fruit of goodly trees) = etrogim (660) in gymmatría and lulav = hayyim (68) in gymmatría so the eits hayyim is a lulav.

Drash (The Rabbinic Explanation)

Another exposition of the text, "the fruit of the hadar tree." Hadar symbolizes Abraham, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, honored (hiddero) with good old age; as it says, "And Abraham was old, well stricken in age (Genesis 24:1)" and it is written, "And honor (vehadarta) the face of the old man (Leviticus 19:32)". Branches (kappot) of palm-trees" symbolizes Isaac who had been tied (kafut) and bound upon the altar. "And boughs of thick trees" symbolizes Jacob; just as the myrtle is crowded with leaves so was Jacob crowded with children. "And willows of the brook" symbolizes Joseph; as the willow wilts before the other three species, so Joseph died before his brothers.

Another exposition of the text, "the fruit of the hadar tree." Hadar symbolizes Sarah whom the Holy One, blessed be He, honored (hidderah) with a good old age; as it says, "Now Abraham and Sara were old (Genesis 18:11)." "Branches of palm-trees" symbolizes Rebeccah; just as the palm-tree contains eatable fruit as well as prickles, so Rebeccah brought forth a righteous man and a wicked one. "And boughs of thick trees" symbolizes Leah; just as the myrtle is crowded with leaves so was Leah crowded with children. "And willows of the brook" symbolizes Rachel; just as the willow wilts before the other three species, so Rachel died before her sister. (Leviticus Rabbah 30:10)

Sod (The Mystical Explanation)

A profound mitzvah/set of mitzvot that bring the s'firot together in a fruitful way symbolized by the following: When taking the lulav you hold seven items in your hands: one etrog, one palm frond, two willow branches and three myrtle branches.

OR

4 species + 6 directions= 10 sfirot

Seven precepts of Sukkot (Leviticus Rabbah 30:2):

four species

the sukkah,

the festival offering

the duty of rejoicing

All is designed to access God's mercy so that the cycle just completed can commence again; the rain should fall; the crops should be renewed; the Torah reading should begin again. The mitzvah of the lulav brings God into these moments of transition and transformation.

Discussion Questions: Making Your Own Pardes

1. Peshat: Name four things you could hold in your hands together that represent the major forces in your life/in your world. (Concentrate especially on those things that you hope will give you some sort of immortality. For example, you could hold a picture of your family, a tsedakah box, a chumash from which you'd studied and a tallit.)
2. Remez: Describe the way these four things relate to each other and what they stand for on a deeper level.
3. Drash: Name a way that each of these four things relates to Jewish tradition; either Jewish law or a person from Jewish history or a story from the Tanach or Talmud or Midrash.
4. Sod: How do these four things relate to the four worlds spoken of in Kabbalah: the physical, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual? Is there any correlation? What does this tell you about where your life is full and where it has room?