

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted October 12, 2005 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### **THOSE NON-SEXIST SAGES ON SUKKOT...YOU GOTTA LOVE 'EM!**

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I know, I know. The sages frequently get a bad rap for being sexist. So I thought it would be nice to show them in an egalitarian light. It's also nice to have a different explanation for the lulav and etrog. They're explaining the following verse:

And on the first day you shall take for yourselves the branches of good trees (pri eits hadar): palm branches (kappot t'marim) and bows of thick trees (anaf eits avot) and willow trees that grow near the brook (arvei nachal) and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. (Leviticus 23:40)

Here's what they have to say:

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 Rebecca; just as the palm-tree contains eatable fruit as well as prickles, so Rebecca 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)

#### **Discussion Questions (Shamelessly taken from my new book Torah and Company):**

1. How could shaking the lulav (the palm frond with willow and myrtle branches) and etrog (citron) be a cause to rejoice? How could it be an expression of joy?
2. As part of the Sukkot celebration in the Temple (called simchat bet hashovea), the innermost garments of the most hidden individuals (i.e., priests), in the most limited-access building (i.e., the Temple), are, in this

ceremony, taken out and burned where everyone can see them! Anthropologists might call this a "ritual of rebellion," wherein a highly role-bound society has one day in which all the roles are reversed. It's a way of defusing communal tension. Do we have any rituals of rebellion today? Or with the relaxation of role definitions, have we lost the need for such rituals?

3. Which one of the four species of the lulav do you think symbolizes you. Do you identify with any of characters from the Torah who correspond to the four species? What are you gathering up when you gather up your lulav?