

The Missing Piece

Rabbi Chanina bit off a piece from his *esrog*, dipped it and ate it. He used the remaining *esrog* to fulfill the mitzvah of taking the four species on Succos.

Three questions are raised in regard to this incident:

- The *gemara* asks: How could he use an *esrog* which is missing any part of it when the *mishna* (Succah 34b) explicitly disqualifies such an *esrog*?
- Tosefos asks: How could he eat from an *esrog* set aside for fulfilling the mitzvah when the *gemara* (Succah 46b) explicitly prohibits doing so?
- Tosefos further asks: How could he eat before fulfilling the mitzvah when the *mishna* (Succah 38a) even requires him to interrupt his meal if he started eating before taking the species?

In regard to the first question, the *gemara* answers that the *mishna's* disqualification of an incomplete *esrog* is limited to the first day when there is a Torah obligation to take the four species. Rabbi Chanina used this incomplete *esrog* on one of the other days when taking the four species is only of rabbinic origin; the Sages who extended this mitzvah to the other days of Succos did not insist upon all the Torah requirements on those days. Just as they did not disqualify a borrowed *esrog* on those days, so too they did not rule out an incomplete one.

Two solutions are offered for the second problem. Tosefos answers that Rabbi Chanina set aside for the mitzvah only as much *esrog* as was necessary for fulfilling the mitzvah, so that the part he ate was not included. This approach is problematic, because on the first day he needed the entire *esrog*. Tosefos solves this problem as well by proposing that Rabbi Chanina set the entire *esrog* aside for the mitzvah on Day One, but only as much as he needed for the mitzvah for the remaining days. *Ritva* suggests a much simpler approach, that Rabbi Chanina ate from an *esrog* which had been designated for eating and only later decided to use it for the mitzvah.

The third question and the answer provided by Tosefos form the basis for an interesting discussion on the issue of eating before taking the four species. Tosefos writes that Rabbi Chanina did not eat from the *esrog* and then fulfill the mitzvah on the same day; rather, he ate from the *esrog* on the previous day (after having fulfilled the mitzvah) and he used this incomplete *esrog* for the mitzvah the next day.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 652:2) rules that it is forbidden to eat before taking the four species. *Magen Avraham* (Footnote 4) explains that this refers to eating a meal, but not to eating some fruit or light refreshment. This would be permitted, just as it is permitted before saying the *Ma'ariv* prayer at night (*Orach Chaim* 235:2) or before searching for *chametz* the night before Pesach (421:2), even though a meal is prohibited in these cases. The aforementioned answer given by Tosefos seems to challenge this position, because he could simply have answered that Rabbi Chanina was not indulging in a meal, only eating a piece of *esrog* fruit.

Magen Avraham responds to this challenge by citing the *gemara's* language in describing the incident: Tosefos understood that the report of Rabbi Chanina "dipping" the *esrog* suggests that he was eating a regular meal in which it was customary to dip the components into something before eating them.

Succah 36b

Separate But Equal

The relationship of each of the four species with one another is fascinating. It is impossible to fulfill the mitzvah of taking them on Succos unless you have all of them. This indicates unity. Yet each of the species has its own individual character.

The *gemara* (*Menachos 27a*) breaks them down into categories — the *lulav* and *esrog* from trees which produce fruit and the *hadas* and *arava* from trees which do not. The Midrash makes an even finer distinction in assigning to the *esrog* the qualities of taste and fragrance, the *lulav* taste (dates) with no fragrance, the *hadas* fragrance without taste, and the *arava* devoid of both.

Taste and smell symbolize Torah knowledge and good deeds. There are four kinds of Jews corresponding to these species – those with both Torah and good deeds, those with Torah but lacking good deeds, those with good deeds but lacking Torah, and those who lack both. The message in both the *gemara* and Midrash is that Hashem commanded us to take all four species to symbolize the need for all the different components of the Jewish People to unite when crying out to Him in a time of trouble and when celebrating in a Festival time of joy.

Such a need for unity might lead us to think that all four species should actually be bound together into one unit. Rabbi Eliezer points out that an analysis of the passage (*Vayikra 22:40*) indicates that the *esrog* must be separate from the other three. The Torah connects the *lulav*, *hadas* and *arava* with a connecting prefix which translates as “and,” but does not connect the *esrog* with this group. This is why we bind together those three and take them in the right hand, because they are three in number and deserving of being taken by the more important hand, while we take the *esrog* alone with our left hand.

If unity is so crucial, it may be asked, why did the Torah order us to keep the *esrog*, symbolizing the righteous Torah scholar with both taste and fragrance, separate from the three other species which are so dependent on his influence?

It has been suggested that in this balance between unity and separation lies the formula for successful interaction between the religious leader and those whom he wishes to teach and inspire. The *esrog* must be careful to maintain his standards and not lower them out of a desire to achieve greater social acceptability. Maintaining this distance must not, however, lead him to abandon his responsibility to enrich the other species with his own taste and fragrance. All four species must therefore be taken together, three in one hand and one in the other, to achieve this perfect blend.

Succah 34b

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