You Need the Twos to Win: Hoshana Rabbah 5787

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We read in Leviticus 23:40:

> On the first day, you shall take the fruit of goodly trees, branches of date palm tree, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Eternal your God for seven days.

In the 3rd century C.E., the rabbis interpreted this verse to mean that we should take the *etrog* (אֶתְרוֹג, "citron"), *lulav* (לוּלָב, "date palm branch"), *hadas* (הֲדַס, "myrtle"), and *aravah* (עֲרָבָה, "willow"). (Mishnah, Sukkah 3:4.)

There are many layers of meaning given to this ritual. For instance, some time in the first half of the 1st millennium C.E., Rabbi Maney noticed that the *etrog* is roughly the same size as a human heart, the *lulav* has a spine, the myrtle leaves look like eyes, and the willow leaves look like lips. Therefore, he argued, we should use our entire body to glorify God by making the world a better place. (Vayyikra Rabbah 30:14.)

It is also true that while the Four Species all grow in the Land of Israel, they grow in different parts. The *lulav* grows in desert, the *etrog* in lowlands, the myrtle in mountains, and the willow by streams. Therefore, taking these species together reminds us of our connection to the whole of the Land of Israel.

Finally, the sages from around Rabbi Maney's time noticed that the *etrog* has a taste and a smell. The *lulav* has a taste (date palm, remember?), but no smell. The myrtle has a smell but no taste. And the willow has neither taste nor smell. The original text compares "taste" to "Torah" (we can remember this because they both start with "t"), and "smell" to "good deeds." Thus, there are some Jews who know a lot of Torah and do a lot of good deeds (represented by the *etrog*), some Jews who know a lot of Torah but don't do a lot of good deeds (represented by the *lulav*), some Jews who don't know a lot of Torah but do a lot of good deeds (represented by the myrtle), and some Jews who neither know a lot of Torah nor do a lot of good deeds (represented by the willow). Yet we bind these all together in order to fulfill the commandment of taking our Four Species. (Vayyikra Rabbah 30:12.)

Expanding this idea slightly, there are some Jews who know a lot of Jewish content and do a lot of Jewish activity. Some Jews know a lot of Jewish content, but don't do much Jewishly. Some Jews do a lot Jewishly, but don't really know the reason behind it. And some Jews don't know much Jewishly nor do much Jewishly. Yet—just as the Four Species aren't complete without the willow, which has neither taste nor smell—the Jewish community isn't complete without each individual Jew, no matter how much they do or know Jewishly. Just like we need all the cards in a deck to win, even the 2s, no matter how much you know Jewishly and do Jewishly, the Jewish comm_nity isn't complete without U.

This week's Torah commentary by Hebrew Seminary Professor David Schwartz has been sponsored anonymously.