

## **SUCCOS - YAACOV CHAYIM HEPNER - THE ESROG - ECHOES OF YOMIM NORO'IM**

י"ז תשרי תשע"ה - 10th October 2014 - שבת חול המועד סוכות

**"ul'kachtem lochem bayom horishon p'ri etz hodor" (Vayikro 23:40) - "On the first day (of Succos) you shall take for yourself a beautiful fruit (an Esrog)"**

Chazal derive from the words 'ul'kachtem lochem', that if a person were to use a Lulav belonging to someone else he would not fulfil his obligation. 'Ul'kachtem lochem' – 'take for yourself' i.e. ensure the Arba Minim belong to you. The Gemoro in Succah (35a) mentions two different points about the phrase 'p'ri etz hodor': The Torah describes the Esrog as 'p'ri etz hodor', the fruit of a beautiful tree. Surely the Torah could have depicted the Esrog simply as 'a beautiful fruit'? The Gemoro explains that this expression tells us that both the Esrog fruit and the wood of its tree have the same taste. The expression 'p'ri etz' denotes the fruit, which shares its flavour with that of its wood.

Secondly, the Gemoro considers the word 'hodor'. The Gemoro expounds that 'hodor' should be understood as 'hador' – that dwells. The Esrog has a unique quality, continues the Gemoro, in that it continues its growth from year to year. As long as it remains on the tree it grows bigger – the fruit will not fall from the tree of its own accord. What was so important to the Torah about the growth of an Esrog? Why does the possuk see fit to give us a botany lesson on this species? The Sefer Kehilas Yitzchok explains the implication of the first statement brought in the Gemoro. At the beginning of Bereishis the Midrash states that the original will of Hakodosh Boruch Hu was that the wood of fruit trees should be edible, and have the same taste as the fruit they would bear. However, the trees rebelled against Hashem's command, and only their fruit was edible. The sole exception to this rebellion was the Esrog tree; according to our Gemoro, the fruit and the wood of the Esrog tree have the same taste!

Every Yomim Noro'im, people promise Hakodosh Boruch Hu to further and better their Avodas Hashem for the duration of the coming year. The Torah was worried that as the Yomim Noro'im draw to a close, we would disregard our resolutions and revert to our previous ways. The Torah orders us to acquire an Esrog, and in so doing, acquire a lesson in our service to the Ribono Shel Olom. In the same way that the Esrog tree stood steadfast and refused to compromise the command of Hashem, so are we reminded to maintain our resolve and continue performing His will obediently.

R' Tzvi Hirsh Ferber zt"l (1879 – 1966), in his Sefer Tzoholas Tzvi clarifies the second idea of the Gemoro. Many other fruits grow during the summer months and fall off their trees in early autumn, shortly after the Yom Tov season. As the Gemoro recounts, this does not apply to the Esrog, which has neither a season of growth nor a time of ripening. The tree, he explains, is a reference to Torah – the tree of life. The Torah indicates to us that we are not to disconnect ourselves from Torah as soon as the Yomim Noro'im are over, like the fruits that fall from their trees in autumn. Rather, we should conduct ourselves like the Esrog, and stay coupled with the Torah constantly. With this in mind we now understand an inner message of the words 'ul'kachtem lochem.' One should take for oneself – a message for oneself - to carry the connection to the Yomim Noro'im throughout the entire year.

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