

# THE MORE PLEASANT, THE MERRIER

*According to the Torah, it is forbidden to add to the Mitzvos. The same applies to the Mitzvos of Sukkah and Lulav, with one exception: one can add as many Hadassim to the Lulav as he'd like. The reason for this may lie in the deeper meaning of the Hadas.*

## **The Queen's Request**

There's a popular expression in America: "The more, the merrier."

This means to say that the more you have of something, the better it is, and the happier it is. More can only be better. But in Judaism, this is not necessarily the case.

When Queen Esther sent her request to the Sages, "establish me for the generations," to establish the holiday of Purim, the Talmud tells us in Tractate Megillah that the Sages and Prophets of that era did not agree. Rather, they found all the excuses in the world to not have to create a new holiday.

The same thing happened when Queen Esther asked the Sages, "Record me for the generations," asking that the Megillah, the Scroll of Esther, be written and added to Scripture. When Esther made her request, the Sages and Prophets were not excited at all at this idea. As the Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi, Tractate Megillah 1:5) tells us, "There were 85 elders and of those, 30

plus several prophets were pained by the matter. They said, 'The Torah states, "These are the mitzvos that G-d commanded Moshe." This is what Moshe told us: no other prophet is destined to innovate a single thing—and now Mordechai and Esther are asking to innovate something new?!'"

The Sages of Israel knew that it was forbidden to add to the mitzvos that G-d commanded Moshe. If there are 613 mitzvos, then that's it! It's illegal to add any new mitzvos to that. Therefore, they were very unexcited by Queen Esther's request to add a holiday to Judaism.

However, she was the queen—and apparently, that's when the entire idea of Rabbinical Mitzvos was born.

As the Talmud tells us: "There were 48 Prophets and seven Prophetesses who prophesied for Israel, and they did not subtract or add to the mitzvos written in the Torah except for the mitzvah of reading the Megillah." Thus, reading the Megillah is the first Rabbinical Mitzvah, in which the Prophets literally added an entirely new mitzvah.

## **Mitzvah Not To Add Mitzvos**

As a matter of fact, there is a mitzvah to not add a new mitzvah!

For example, a tallis has four fringes; it is forbidden to put five fringes on a tallis—the mitzvah specifically requires four, not five or three.

And the same thing applies to time-based mitzvos—you're not allowed to add another day to any holiday. "But we love Sukkos

so much! Let's start it a day earlier. What's so terrible about that? It's such a beautiful holiday!" But it's not allowed.

This is also true for the headpiece of tefillin. It contains four parchment writings, one in each of its four compartments. It's forbidden to add another writing or compartment to the head tefillin, and so on and so forth with every mitzvah.

So too with lulav, for one more example: you can't recite the blessing over the lulav once in the morning—and then recite it a second time later because you're so excited about doing the mitzvah of lulav. You can't even add to the details of the mitzvah: the Torah states that the mitzvah requires four components—so we can't add a fifth component to make it more modernized and current. It must be exactly four.

Furthermore, we can't add to the four components themselves. We can't use two lulavim but rather, only one lulav with one esrog—and only two willow branches and not more.

## **The Exception of Hadassim**

But with this particular mitzvah, there is one exception: the hadassim, the myrtle branches.

Halachah tells us that there must be at least three myrtle branches—but a person has the choice to add however many hadassim desired. The Chabad custom is to use at least six hadassim. There were times when the Rebbe would use a lulav with 18 hadassim, corresponding to the famous number "Chai." There were also times when the Rebbe used 26 hadassim, the numeric value of G-d's name, Hashem. And in the last years,

the Rebbe used 36 hadassim, which add up to twice Chai.

In various scholarly sources, the custom of using 68 hadassim is also mentioned—68 is the numeric value of the Hebrew word “lulav.” There are even those who use 100 hadassim—I can only imagine what a lulav with 100 hadassim looks like!

But the question is: why do we break all the rules with hadassim? We are able to use as many as we want, and nobody objects?

The Rambam writes that the entire concept of the hadassim is to lend elegance and beauty—and so the more hadassim you add, the more beautified a mitzvah you have.

## **Four Personalities**

But maybe we can explain it another way.

The Four Species are divided into two categories, as the Talmud tells us: “There are four species to the mitzvah of lulav—two are fruit-bearing and two are not.” The two that bear fruit are the esrog and the date palm tree (which produces the lulav), and two that do not are the hadas and aravah, the myrtle and willow branches.

Even in life we can say that these categories give us four personality types.

There are people like the esrog, who constantly produce “fruits”: they are creative and know how to get things done, and they also have a “pleasant aroma”—meaning that he’s nice to have around. But if he doesn’t have a “pleasant aroma,” if he

“stinks,” then no one can stand him or get anywhere near him, whether physically or socially. “Esrog people” are pleasant company and are also super-achievers. But there are very few people like that—which is why we only use one esrog: there are not too many “esrogim.”

The lulav, for its part, symbolizes the person with tons of energy, which is why he gets a lot done—he “bears fruits.” But he’s not a person pleasant to be around—he yells at people, he’s not the nicest person, and so even if he achieves great things, people don’t want to deal with him. And that’s why you can’t add another lulav—because nobody wants more of these people around.

Then come the willows. The willow is the type of person who bears no fruits. He doesn’t create anything and on top of that, he doesn’t smell good—he’s unpleasant. We don’t need too many of that type—even two is more than enough.

But the hadassim, the myrtles, on the other hand, are the type of person who doesn’t “bear fruit”—he doesn’t produce anything and doesn’t contribute much to the world. In short, he’s not an achiever. But he’s a person with a “pleasant aroma”—it’s nice to be his friend, he’s happy, he’s good-hearted, and it’s fun to be with him.

## **Do You Have an Aroma?**

The entire concept of Sukkos is unity. And to create unity, the most important thing is for a person to have a “pleasant aroma.” Nobody really cares how much you achieved or did—what people really want from you is something else

altogether. They want you to be a mentch, a gentleman, a pleasant person, and a respectable human being.

Unlike the other types, pleasant people are always welcome in shul, because that's the most important thing needed in a community—which is why we can add as many hadassim as we want.

So if you know a myrtle or two or 18, please—bring them to shul! There's always room for more.