



The Four Species

A Basic Guide

What are the 4 Species?

1. The taking of the 4 species is a Torah obligation. The verse (Leviticus 23:40) states: “And you shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of a beautiful tree, the branch of the palm tree, a bough from the avot tree and willows of the stream, and you shall rejoice before your God for seven days.” The fruit of a beautiful tree is the etrog. The branch of the palm tree is the lulav. The bough from the avot tree is the hadas – twigs of the myrtle tree. The willows of the stream is the aravah which grows alongside the streams.
2. To fulfill the commandment one takes one etrog, one palm branch, three myrtle branches and two willow branches.
3. The four species together comprise one unit. Thus, if one of the species is missing the commandment has not been fulfilled.

Symbolism of the Set

In earlier days if a litigant’s claim before the royal court was decided in his favor, he would receive a spear from the king. When he left the palace holding the king’s spear aloft all knew that he had been victorious in his suit. Similarly, during the Days of Awe, the Jewish people were on trial before the Heavenly Court. On Sukkot, the ‘season of joy’ we celebrate our happiness that God has accepted our repentance – a confidence symbolized by the lulav held aloft.

When Do We Take the Set?

1. The four species are “taken” every day of the festival. However, on the Sabbath one should not “take” the four species.
2. The commandment of taking the four species applies only by day and not by night.

The Binding of the Set

When binding the lulav, the spine of the lulav is placed facing the person and the hadassim – the myrtle branches tied to the right and the aravot – willows on the left side, slightly lower than the hadassim.

Sequence of Preparation

1. One takes the lulav in the right hand with the spine facing the person.
2. Then one takes the etrog in the left hand with the Pitom – the top facing down and the Oketz – the bottom of the fruit where it was connected to the tree, pointing upwards. Then one may recite the blessings.
3. After reciting the blessings, the etrog is turned over with the etrog held close to the lulav so that they are as one unit, and the four species are waved.
4. We hold the etrog face down before the blessings because blessings are usually recited before performing a commandment. Were one to hold all four of the species in the direction of their growth, one would immediately fulfill the commandment. Thus, by taking the etrog upside down, we can delay fulfilling the commandment and recite the blessing beforehand. We then turn the etrog over (i.e., so that it is held in the direction that it grows) and perform the commandment of “taking” the four species.

The Waving of the 4 Species

1. In addition to holding the four species together, which is sufficient for the performance of the commandment – one should also perform the waving, (or shaking) of the species in six directions – the four points of the compass, up and down.
2. It is preferable that one face east while waving the species.
3. The sequence followed in most congregations is the straight ahead (east), right (south), back (west), left (north), up and down.

The Blessings

1. Before waving the four species, the appropriate blessings should be recited.
2. On the first day, two blessings are recited and on the second day and every day thereafter one blessing is said.
3. The second blessing (the shehecheyanu) is recited on the first day only. If however the first day of Sukkot coincides with the Sabbath, this blessing is recited on Sunday.
4. If one was unable to take the four species on the first day of Sukkot, he recites the second blessing the first time he is able to, regardless of which day of Sukkot it is.

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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת לולָב:

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitz'votav v'tzi'vanu, al netilat lulav.

**Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe,
Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded
us concerning the taking of a palm branch.**

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The following blessing is recited on the first day only.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהֵחֵיֵינוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה:

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam,
She-he-che-ya-nu v'ki-y'manu v-hi-gi-yanu lazman hazeh.

**Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe,
Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.**

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