

Lulav 101

Laws of the Jewish Holidays
in a Simple and Concise Language

- ❖ Preparing Your Lulav and Esrog
- ❖ Performing the Mitzvah
- ❖ Keeping them Kosher

By R' Yochanan Schnall

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בס"ד

אשירה לד' כי גמל עלי

I am indebted to my wife for all the patience and support she continues to have for me.

Thank you my dear reader, for without your interest this pamphlet would not exist.

Much thanks as well to the Minneapolis Community Kollel for their resources.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to be a quick review of some pertinent laws relevant to this time of year. It was formulated for those who do not have the opportunity or resources to study the laws in detail.

Many of these laws are drawn from the sefer:

The Laws of the Four Minim by Rabbi Shimon D. Eider זצ"ל

If you have any feedback, please share it with me at: yochanan.schnall@gmail.com.

Feel welcome to make copies of this pamphlet for free dissemination

Tishrei 5773

Note: The halachic measurement of a "tefach" is very relevant for the laws of the four species. There is much dispute over how many inches it equals. This pamphlet follows the opinion of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein.

❖ Preparing Your Lulav and Esrog

Identifying What You Have

The lulav and esrog are easily recognizable. In addition, there should be five leafy branches: Three hadasim (myrtles) - they have small eye shaped leaves and two aravos (willows) - their leaves are elongated.

- Some refer to all the branches collectively as a lulav and the entire set as a lulav and esrog.

Placing Them in a Bundle

Below are some guidelines for assembling your lulav bundle. Even if this has been done for you, it is up to you to ensure that they stay properly assembled.

- The lulav set often comes with a special holder made of woven lulav leaves. It has a wide opening in the middle for the lulav and tubes on its sides for the hadasim and aravos. This is a nice thing to use but not necessary.
- One side of the lulav has a hard green "spine". Place down the lulav on a flat surface spine-side up. If you are using the holder, insert the lulav through the wide middle hole its spine facing you¹.
- The hadasim should be set on the right of the lulav and the aravos on its left².
 - A word of caution: When inserting the hadasim and aravos, be careful not to cause their leaves to rip off since this could invalidate them³. It might help to push down on the top circular lip of the tubes as the branches are inserted. If the tubes are still too tight, get a different holder or don't use one altogether.
- The hadasim should be placed so that their stem tips extend higher than the aravos' stems⁴.
 - Aravos often come very long and require shortening. Always trim them from the bottom and *never* from the top. An aravah becomes invalid if its natural tip has been removed⁵.
- As you follow the lulav's spine upwards, you will see where it concludes and splits into separate leaves. This point should be approximately four inches higher than the top of the hadasim stems⁶.

Tying Them Together

- The lulav is bound to itself⁷. Customarily, three bands are used⁸.
 - The uppermost binding should be at approximately four inches lower than the top of the lulav so that the lulav's leaves rustle when it is shaken⁹.
- The lulav is also bound together with the hadasim and aravos¹⁰. There are different opinions if this is counted as one of the three ties of the lulav or not¹¹.
- Detached lulav leaves are customarily used for all the bindings¹²
- These bindings are all fastened with knots¹³. The knots are often made in a decorative manner but this is not a requirement.
 - It is forbidden to tie a knot on the first two days of Yom Tov so be sure to bind your lulav beforehand.¹⁴
 - If the need arises on Yom Tov, instead of making a knot wrap the strap around a few times and tuck the ends into the binding¹⁵.

Keeping Them Fresh

- In order to keep the hadasim and aravos fresh, it is proper to store them with some water¹⁶.
- Everyone has their special trick that works best for them. Whatever yours is, be sure to begin storing them in the water before Yom Tov begins. During the first two days of Yom Tov it is only permitted to return them to water that they have previously been stored in.¹⁷

❖ Performing the Mitzvah

- The mitzvah of shaking the lulav and esrog is performed while standing¹⁸.
- Since nothing should interrupt between your hands and the four species, any rings, tefillin or unnecessary bandages must be removed before performing the mitzvah¹⁹.
 1. Find the appropriate blessings in your siddur and prop it open to the page. (In most siddurim, it is just before Hallel.)
 2. Hold the lulav in your right hand²⁰ with the lulav's green spine facing you²¹. The hadasim should be on your right and the aravos on your left²².
 3. With your left hand, pick up the esrog upside down, with the green stem facing upwards²³.
 - If you are a lefty, hold the lulav in the left hand and the esrog in the right one²⁴.
 4. Recite the blessing.
 - If it is the first time you are performing the mitzvah this year, say the *Shehechyanu* blessing as well²⁵.
 5. Carefully turn the esrog over, now the green stem should be pointing downwards. This is the position it will remain in while performing the mitzvah²⁶.
 - If the esrog could fall while you turn it over, gently put it down and then pick it up again right side up.
 6. Bring your hands together so that the esrog is touching the lulav²⁷, now you are in position.
 - The basic obligation:
 - While holding the lulav and esrog together, shake them a little²⁸.
 - Fulfilling the obligation properly:
 - While keeping the lulav and esrog upright²⁹ and together, extend them towards each of the six directions³⁰. There is no reason to turn around- when extending behind you, point them over your shoulder³¹.
 - In every direction, the extending should be done back and forth three times³².
 - As you extend and withdraw, gently shake the bundle- just enough to slightly rustle the lulav's leaves³³.
- There are two prevalent customs regarding the order of directions:
 - Front, right, back, left, up and down³⁴
 - Right, left, front, up, down, and back³⁵
- A few things to be cautious of:
 - Be careful when shaking the lulav since shaking it vigorously can easily invalidate it.
 - Additionally, be careful not to poke anyone or anything while shaking. This is particularly relevant when extending behind you.
- One may not intentionally smell the haddasim in order to enjoy their scent throughout Sukkos.³⁶ A similar rule should be applied to the esrog.³⁷
- Many have a custom to face east when performing the mitzvah.³⁸ Some have a custom to perform this mitzvah in the sukkah³⁹.

Owning the Four Species

For the first two days of Sukkos, the four species must belong to you in order to fulfill the mitzvah⁴⁰. After then, this is no longer a concern.

- Therefore, if are fulfilling the mitzvah during these days with someone else's set, it is not enough to borrow it. Rather, you must obtain permission to acquire it as a gift⁴¹. When you are finished, be sure to give it back as a gift so that the original owner can reacquire it.
- Since a child under bar/bas mitzvah lacks the legal capability to relinquish ownership, once he or she has acquired a lulav and esrog the child will remain its owner. Generally speaking, one should only lend them to a child⁴².

Who Is Obligated?

- All men and boys over bar mitzvah are included in this obligation.⁴³
 - Boys under bar mitzvah who are old enough to understand its concept are obligated as well⁴⁴.
Note that a child must fulfill the obligation with a valid set. Beware of merchants who sell invalid sets intended for children.
 - A parent who can afford to purchase individual lulav sets for each of his sons should do so in order that they can pray with them in shul⁴⁵.
- Women are exempt from this mitzvah but they may perform it if they wish⁴⁶.
 - Women who follow the Ashkenazic tradition should also recite the appropriate blessing⁴⁷.

Timeframes

- The lulav and esrog are not used on Shabbos⁴⁸.
 - In fact, they are muktzah objects and cannot be moved⁴⁹.
- Otherwise, this mitzvah is performed every day of Sukkos through Hoshana Rabba (the seventh day)⁵⁰.
- Ideally, the mitzvah should be done after sunrise, but it may be performed after dawn (seventy-two minutes earlier).⁵¹
 - Once the mitzvah becomes available, men and boys over bar mitzvah may not eat until performing it⁵².

❖ Using the Lulav and Esrog in Shul

In addition to the general mitzvah performance, the lulav and esrog are brought to the synagogue. They are held and shaken during Hallel⁵³ as well as during a prayer exclusive to Sukkos called "Hoshanos".

Hallel

The lulav and esrog are held throughout Hallel and shaken at specific points. Instructions for this can be found in most siddurim, especially those with an English translation.

Hoshanos

Hoshanos is a prayer that involves taking a Sefer Torah to the center of the synagogue. The entire congregation then makes a circuit around the Torah while holding their lulav and esrog sets⁵⁴. Each day of Sukkos a different paragraph is recited which is determined by which the day of the week it is. Instructions can be found in most siddurim, especially those with an English translation. (It helps to know ahead of time which paragraph will be recited.)

- While performing hoshanos, it is difficult to juggle a siddur, lulav and esrog. To this end, some have published small cards that have the texts printed on them (although none with an English translation©).

- On Shabbos, Hoshanos is recited without encircling the Sefer Torah and (obviously) without the lulav and esrog⁵⁵.
- Regarding someone who is within the twelve months of mourning for a parent, there are different customs whether he circles the synagogue or recites Hoshanos holding the lulav and esrog at his seat⁵⁶.

Hoshana Rabbah

On Hoshana Rabbah (the seventh day of Sukkos), every Sefer Torah in the synagogue is brought to the middle and six circuits are made around them. More prayers are then recited while holding a bundle of aravos. The bundle -also referred to as "hoshanos" – is often available for purchase at the synagogue.

- Be prepared! Because of all these additional prayers, shacharis on Hoshana Rabba is quite long.

❖ Keeping Them Kosher

Hopefully, you have purchased your lulav and esrog from someone reliable since many undetectable issues can disqualify them (such as if they were illegally obtained⁵⁷ or from a hybrid plant⁵⁸).

In addition, it is always a good idea to show your set to a rabbi who is familiar with its laws. This is a practice that exists in Jewish communities throughout the world (and has probably existed throughout our history as well). A knowledgeable rabbi will help determine that your set does not have any visible disqualifications. He will also help you appreciate what you have.

Otherwise, it is up to you to maintain their kosher status. To this end, please find below some common issues that could develop.

Esrog

- The top of an esrog begins at the point when it starts to narrow as it slopes upwards. This area is referred to as the *chotem* or nose⁵⁹. Especially in this area, any spot that is a different color than the surrounding area should be shown to a rabbi. Attempting to remove it yourself can often do more harm than good⁶⁰.
- The uppermost tip of an esrog may have a small woody stem called a "pittum". The pittum is a remainder of the blossom from which the esrog developed. If it falls off after an esrog is formed, the esrog will likely become invalid⁶¹. Therefore, if you have a pittum on your esrog take care that it remains intact.
 - If your esrog did not come with a pittum, don't worry. The pittum sometimes falls off at a very early stage in the esrog's development, which is not a disqualification⁶². (Nonetheless, since it is difficult to ascertain when a pittum has truly fallen off, one has to rely on the seller's word that it grew without one. This is yet another reason to buy your lulav and esrog from a reliable source.)

Lulav

A word of caution: Before "discovering" your lulav, ask a knowledgeable person to guide you. The lulav's tip is sensitive and easily rendered invalid.

T'yomes

Starting from the bottom of the lulav, follow up its hard green spine. You should see it conclude and split into two or three separate leaves. The central one of these leaves is called the *t'yomes* or twin. Although not apparent, it is a doubled leaf⁶³. The *t'yomes* should remain intact without being separated⁶⁴. (When there are only two leaves, both of them have "t'yomes status".)

- If the *t'yomes* has split along the majority of its length, the lulav is invalid⁶⁵.
- If only the minority of it is split, the lulav is still kosher but not ideal⁶⁶.

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- In all circumstances, if the *t'yomes* appears forked at its tip it is invalid⁶⁷.
- **Always be careful when handling and storing the lulav. Knocking it into something can split the *t'yomes* and easily make the lulav invalid.**
- A lulav is invalid if its spine or most of its leaves have dried out so much that they have turned white⁶⁸.

Hadasim

- Hadasim must be a minimum of 11 inches from the tip of its stem. Most hadasim are longer than this, but this length is what has significance.⁶⁹
- Hadasim have leaf clusters along its stem. Each cluster should have three leaves and these leaves should sprout at the exact same point as they encircle the stem.
 - A choice hadas has the entire 11-inches from its tip with leaves in clusters of three with each set sprouting at the same point⁷⁰.
 - For a hadas to be kosher, a majority of this length (5.6") must have leaves in clusters of three with each set sprouting at the same point. The 5.6" does not need to be the top half- it may be anywhere along the stem⁷¹.
 - If because leaves fell off it no longer has this majority, it should be shown to a rabbi⁷².
- The tip of the twig with the top cluster of leaves has exceptional significance. A severed tip is still kosher as long as leaves still cover the cut although the hadas is no longer ideal⁷³.

Aravos

- A leaf growing out of the stem's tip indicates a choice aravah⁷⁴.
- If the top of an aravah's stem is severed, the aravah is invalid⁷⁵.
- Just as by hadasim, the minimum length for aravos is 11 inches from the tip of its stem. If leaves in this area have fallen off or have dried out so much that they no longer look green, the aravah's status is as follows:
 - If there is no longer a majority (5.6") of healthy leaves, the aravah is invalid⁷⁶.
 - If there is a majority of green leaves, but they are loosely connected, split or torn, the aravah should not be used⁷⁷.
- **Aravos dry out quickly and unless you replace them with new ones at least once during Sukkos, it is unlikely that you will actually fulfill the mitzvah the entire holiday⁷⁸.**

Disposing the Four Species

- An object that was used for a mitzvah cannot be treated with disrespect. Therefore, the lulav and esrog should not be placed in the garbage without wrapping it first. Similarly, they should not be placed where they could be stepped on⁷⁹.
- Many have the custom to save it for burning with the chametz⁸⁰. What better mitzvah disposal exists than using it for another mitzvah!
 - A word to the wise: If they will be saved for Pesach, remove them from any plastic. Otherwise, they will get moldy and unfit for fuel.

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- ¹ Mishna Berura 650:8
² Mishna Berura 651:12
³ Mishna Berura 647:8
⁴ Rema 651:1, Mishna Berura 651:12
⁵ Shulchan Aruch 647:2, Mishna Berura 647:12
⁶ Shulchan Aruch 650:2
⁷ Mishna Berura 651:14
⁸ Rema 651:1
⁹ Mishna Berura 651:14
¹⁰ Shulchan Aruch 651:1
¹¹ Mishna Berura 651:14
¹² Mateh Efrayim- Chayim U'Bracha: 6
¹³ Shulchan Aruch 651:1
¹⁴ Shulchan Aruch 651:1
¹⁵ Rema 651:1
¹⁶ Mishna Berura 654:4
¹⁷ Shulchan Aruch 654:1
¹⁸ Mishna Berura 651:27
¹⁹ Mishna Berura 651:36
²⁰ Shulchan Aruch 651:2
²¹ Mishna Berura 650:8
²² Mishna Berura 651:15
²³ Shulchan Aruch 651:5
²⁴ Rema 651:3
²⁵ Shulchan Aruch 651:5
²⁶ See Mishna Berura 651:17
²⁷ Shulchan Aruch 651:11
²⁸ Rema 651:11
²⁹ Shulchan Aruch 651:2
³⁰ Shulchan Aruch 651:9
³¹ Mishna Berura 651:47
³² Shulchan Aruch 651:9
³³ Rema 651:9; Mishna Berura 651:44,47
³⁴ Shulchan Aruch 651:9,10
³⁵ Magen Avraham 651:21
³⁶ Shulchan Aruch 653:1
³⁷ Shulchan Aruch 653:1; Biur Halacha 216 "V'yeish Omrim"
³⁸ Mishna Berura 651:47
³⁹ Mishna Berura 651:34
⁴⁰ Shulchan Aruch 658:3
⁴¹ Shulchan Aruch 658:3

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- ⁴² Mishna Berura 658:28
⁴³ Shulchan Aruch 652:2
⁴⁴ Shulchan Aruch 657:1
⁴⁵ Mishna Berura 657:4
⁴⁶ Rema 65:9
⁴⁷ Rema 689:6
⁴⁸ Shulchan Aruch 658:2
⁴⁹ Rema 658:2
⁵⁰ Shulchan Aruch 658:2
⁵¹ Shulchan Aruch 652:1; Mishna Berura 652:3
⁵² Shulchan Aruch 652:2
⁵³ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 651:8
⁵⁴ Shulchan Aruch 660:1
⁵⁵ Rema 660:1
⁵⁶ Rema 660:2
⁵⁷ Shulchan Aruch 649:1
⁵⁸ Mishna Berura 648:65
⁵⁹ Shulchan Aruch 648:9
⁶⁰ See Mishna Berura 648:25
⁶¹ Shulchan Aruch, Rema, Mishna Berura 648:5
⁶² Rema 648:7
⁶³ Shulchan Aruch 645:3
⁶⁴ Rema 645:3
⁶⁵ Mishna Berura 645:16
⁶⁶ Rema 645:3
⁶⁷ Mishna Berura 645:19
⁶⁸ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 645:5; Mishna Berura 645:25
⁶⁹ Biur Halacha 647 "I'ikuva"
⁷⁰ Shulchan Aruch 646:5
⁷¹ Shulchan Aruch 647:5; Biur Halacha ad loc. "v'li'ikuvah"
⁷² See Mishna Berura 646:18
⁷³ Rema 646:10; Mishna Berura 646:29
⁷⁴ Mateh Efrayim- Chayim Ubracha: 68
⁷⁵ Shulchan Aruch 647:2; Mishna Berura 647:7
⁷⁶ Shulchan Aruch 647:2, Mishna Berura 647:7
⁷⁷ Mishna Berura 647:9
⁷⁸ See Rema 654
⁷⁹ Shulchan Aruch, Rema 665:8
⁸⁰ Rema 665:9