

# Four Kinds, One Bundle

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*A Pact Signed in a Sukkah, and What Agudah Achat Asks of Partners*

*Chol HaMoed Sukkot 5787 · Yerushalayim*

On Saturday night, as the first day of Sukkot ended, five party leaders sat down together in a sukkah. Yair Lapid was the host. His guests were Naftali Bennett, Gadi Eisenkot, Avigdor Liberman and Yair Golan. Before they left, they signed a document. They committed not to attack one another's parties or leaders, to form joint working groups, and to leave the choice of a candidate for prime minister until after the vote. Benny Gantz was not invited.

The election is on 27 October, one month away. Prime Minister Netanyahu responded in one line: "Only a big Likud will stop them."

I am not writing to tell anyone how to vote. Readers of these pages sit on every side of the map, and they should. I am writing because the pact was signed in a sukkah, in the week of the four kinds, and the Torah has something to say about bundles.

## The bundle of the four kinds

On the first day of Sukkot, the Torah commands: "You shall take for yourselves the fruit of a beautiful tree, branches of date palms, a bough of a thick-leaved tree, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the L-rd your G-d seven days" (Vayikra 23:40).

The Midrash reads the four kinds as four kinds of Jews (Vayikra Rabbah 30:12). The etrog has both taste and fragrance: these are the Jews who have both Torah and good deeds. The lulav, from the date palm, has taste but no fragrance: Torah without deeds. The myrtle has fragrance but no taste: deeds without Torah. The willow has neither. And what does G-d do with them? He does not discard the willow or crown the etrog. He says: let them all be bound together in one bundle, *agudah achat*, and they will atone for one another.

The Midrash is not naïve about the differences. It names them sharply. It says, in effect, that the four kinds are not alike and will never be alike. The bundle does not erase the difference between the etrog and the willow. It asks them to stand together anyway, and it promises that when they do, each one covers what the others lack.

## What a no-attacks pact is

Whatever one thinks of the politics, the text these five leaders signed is, at its core, a promise about speech. They agreed not to attack partner parties or partner leaders. That is a modest promise, and in an Israeli election campaign an unusual one. It means that during the most heated month of the year, they will argue about policy with others, but they have agreed not to turn their fire on each other.

There is a Torah here, too. The Sages taught that the second Temple was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, among Jews who studied Torah and did good deeds. Rabbi Akiva's students, the tradition says, died because they did not show respect to one another. Our tradition is full of warnings about the damage that Jews do with their mouths to other Jews.

A promise to restrain one's speech toward partners is, in that light, a small act of *agudah achat*. It is worth noticing, whether or not one supports the partners.

### **The one outside the walls**

But the sukkah had walls, and one leader was outside them. Benny Gantz was not invited.

I do not know the reasons, and I will not guess at them. Politics has its own arithmetic. But the image stays with me, because the four kinds carry a lesson about exclusion, too. The halachah is strict: if even one of the four kinds is missing, the mitzvah cannot be fulfilled. A bundle of three is not a smaller mitzvah. It is no mitzvah at all. The Torah seems to insist that the bundle is defined by who is in it, and that leaving someone out is not a neutral act.

That lesson cuts in every direction. It applies to the bloc that met in the sukkah and left a colleague outside. It applies to every campaign, on every side, that will ask voters to see the other bloc only as something to be stopped. It applies to all of us, in a campaign season when each camp is tempted to define the people of Israel as those who vote its way. The question of who belongs inside the walls of Israeli politics is live and painful, and it is a question the Torah does not let us answer lightly.

### **What the bundle asks of partners who disagree**

The four kinds do not agree. That is the whole point. They differ in taste and in fragrance, in shape and in the soil they grow in. The palm grows in the heat of the valley; the willow grows by the brook. If they were alike, there would be no need to bind them.

What the bundle asks is not agreement. It asks three harder things.

First, restraint. The etrog does not sneer at the willow. Each kind is held in the hand beside the others, and none is shaken apart. A pact against attacking partners is an attempt, however political, at that restraint. The same restraint is owed across the aisle, from every camp to every other.

Second, humility about one's own place. The Midrash does not tell us which of us is the etrog. Every camp in Israeli politics is tempted to cast itself as the one with both taste and fragrance, and its rivals as the willow. The Midrash refuses to hand out those roles by party. Every Jew has some of each.

Third, the awareness that the bundle is bigger than any gathering. The lulav is lifted and waved in all directions, east and south, west and north, up and down, because the One to whom we lift it fills all directions. No single sukkah, and no party headquarters anywhere, is large enough to contain the whole of Israel.

### **Lifting the bundle together**

In a month, Israelis will vote. Some will vote for the parties that met in that sukkah, some for Likud, some for others. The day after the vote, all of them will still be one people, bound, whether they like it or not, in a single bundle of covenant.

This week, when we take the four kinds in our hands, may we remember what the Midrash promised: that when we are bound together, we atone for one another. May our leaders, all of them, find the restraint to argue without tearing, and may all of us find the humility to see the etrog in the one we disagree with.

## Sources

- Vayikra 23:40 (the four kinds)
- Vayikra Rabbah 30:12 (the four kinds as four kinds of Jews, bound in one bundle, *agudah achat*, atoning for one another)
- Yoma 9b (the second Temple and *sinat chinam*)
- Yevamot 62b (Rabbi Akiva's students)

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