

## **Class One: The Verse and the Basic Mitzvah of Arba Minim**

### **Goals:**

By the end of the class, students should

1. Know Vayikra 23:40 [by heart, or be assigned to do so], and have generated questions on it
2. Consider the relationship between this verse and contemporary practice of Arba Minim (four species).

### **Materials:**

Tanakhim, Source Sheets

### **Lesson:**

#### **1. Introduction**

- A. We will be studying the third chapter of Masekhet Sukkah. The first two chapters deal primarily with the laws of the sukkah itself, while the third transitions into a discussion of the Arba Minim.
- B. Based on students' life experience/prior knowledge, what does the mitzvah of Arba Minim entail? How is this mitzvah performed? Invite students to draw pictures, use gestures, whatever is necessary to convey the performance of the mitzvah. Put some ideas on the board (include words like etrog, shaking, binding, etc..., which are not explicitly mentioned in verse below). [5 minutes]

#### **2. The Verse**

The scriptural source for the mitzvah of Arba Minim is Vayikra 23:40.

Everyone should open up a Tanakh, and locate this verse (noting its context). [2 minutes]

[Students should commit this verse to memory, ideally by learning to chant it with ta'amim. If students do not yet have this skill, they can simply memorize the chant of ta'amei hamikrah or this can be used as an opportunity to teach them those ta'amim that occur in the verse.]

#### **3. From the Verse to Practice, and Analyzing the Verse**

- A. How do we get from this verse, to the practices described in part I above? For example, which of the nouns found in the verse refer to the Lulav, which the Etrog, etc..?

[Note: Students who know of the practice of Arba Minim on all 7/8 days of Sukkot will have to explain the reference to the "first day." Students might be forced to render the verbs ולקחתם or ושמחתם as "take and shake," or else claim that the *na'anuim* (shaking) of the Arba Minim is not mentioned in the verse]. [10 minutes]

### 1. ויקרא כג:מ

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הַדֶּרֶךְ כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וְעֵגֶרֶף עֵץ-עֵבֶת וְעֵרְבֵי-נַחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְ-  
הוָה  
אֶ-לֵהִיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

### 2. נחמיה ח'

יג וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי נֶאֱסָפוּ רֵאשֵׁי הָאֲבוֹת לְכָל-הָעָם הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם אֶל-עֲזָרָא הַסֹּפֵר וְלִהְשָׁכִיל אֶל-דְּבַר־י  
הַתּוֹרָה: יד וַיִּמְצְאוּ כְּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְ-הוָה בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁבוּ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּסֻכּוֹת בְּחָג  
בַּחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי: טו וְאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמִיעוּ וַיַּעֲבִירוּ קוֹל בְּכָל-עִרְיָהֶם וּבִירוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר צִוָּה הָרַר וְהִבִּיאוּ עָלֵי-  
זֵית וְעָלֵי-עֵץ נֶשֶׁן וְעָלֵי הַדֶּס וְעָלֵי תְּמָרִים וְעָלֵי עֵץ עֵבֶת לַעֲשׂוֹת סֻכּוֹת כַּכְּתוּב: {פ}

טז וַיִּצְאוּ הָעָם וַיְבִיאוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם סֻכּוֹת אִישׁ עַל-גִּגּוֹ וּבַחֲצֵרֹתֵיהֶם וּבַחֲצֵרוֹת בֵּית הָאֵל -לֵהִים וּבִרְחוֹב  
שַׁעַר הַמַּיִם וּבִרְחוֹב שַׁעַר אֶפְרָיִם: יז וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל-הַקְּהָל הַשְּׂבִיִּים מִן-הַשְּׂבִי א סֻכּוֹת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בְּסֻכּוֹת כִּי  
לֹא-עָשׂוּ מִימֵי יִשׁוּעַ בֶּן-נּוּן כֹּן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וַתְּהִי שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד: יח וַיִּקְרָא בְּסֹפֵר  
תּוֹרַת הָאֵל-לֵהִים יוֹם א בַּיּוֹם מִן-הַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן עַד הַיּוֹם הָאַחֲרוֹן וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-חֵל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי  
עֲצָרַת כְּמִשְׁפָּט: {פ}

### 3. אבן עזרא ויקרא פרק כג פסוק מ

אבן עזרא ויקרא פרק כג פסוק מ  
ולקחתם לכם אנחנו נאמין בדברי המעתיקים, כי לא יכחישו הכתוב,  
גם הם העתיקו כי פרי עץ הדר הוא אתרוג. ובאמת כי אין פרי עץ יותר הדר ממנו,  
והצדוקים אמרו, כי מאלה תעשו סוכות, והביאו ראיה מס' עזרא. ואלה עורי לב. הלא  
יראו, כי אין בספר עזרא ערבי נחל ולא פרי עץ כלל, רק עלי חמשה מינים.

We trust in the words of the Rabbis, for they would not contradict scripture...  
They also taught that the “the fruit of goodly trees” refers to an *etrog*. Indeed it is  
true that there is no fruit more beautiful...The Sadducees say that the mitzva is to  
make from the Arba Minim, sukkot. These [the Sadducees] are blind of heart.  
Can't it be seen, that in Sefer Ezra there is no reference to the willows of the  
brook, or any fruit of a tree, only the leaves of the five species?!

- B. Next, take two minutes and have each student generate and record at least three questions on the verse (this may well emerge organically from trying to address 3.A); record the questions on the board, and later on a large poster which will be hung up on a wall of the classroom. Some questions which might emerge

organically, or which the teacher should raise: What is the meaning of ולקחתם לכם (what does the latter word mean in this context)? [Compare to other usages of this construction, e.g. Beresheet 12:1 "lekh lekha," or Shemot 12:3]. Is the mitzvah practiced for one day, or seven? What does לפני י-הוה א-להיכם signify? Is there a distinction between the instruction at the beginning of the verse (ולקחתם) and at the end (ושמחתם)?

- C. Turn to Nehemiah 8, and note the context (discovery of laws written in the Torah). Read through verses 13-18. Have students turn to their neighbors, and debate with each other (assign each student one position): "Does pasuk 15 in Nehemiah interpret Vayikra 23:40 differently than the way we are used to explaining it?" Have students record their arguments. Either during or after this mini-hevrutah, include the reference to Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 23:40.

Depending on the general orientation of the class, one can either leave this question as unresolved ('tzarikh iyyun,') or alternatively champion one of the two readings.

To champion the rabbinic reading, one might argue that the verse in Nehemiah takes for granted that Vayikra 23 commands an independent mitzvah of 'Netilat Lulav,' and is merely adding an additional point: not only are these species to be 'taken' in an independent ritual of Arba Minim; they are also to be used in constructing the sukkah. Such an addition makes conceptual sense if one sees the two mitzvot of the holiday – sukkah and Arba Minim – as essentially related to/complementing one another. Indeed, this perspective finds expression in two rabbinic sources:

1. In articulating the rules of the sukkah, the Gemara (Sukkah 11b) presents a position (one which might not be adopted by all Tannaim): ילפינן לולב מסוכה. This position would allow one to infer the parameters of the mitzvah of lulav from those of sukkah (and conceivably, vice-versa). Such a position makes sense when one assumes that though they constitute two separate mitzvot, sukkah and Arba Minim are nonetheless related mitzvot; and this relationship is expressed in Nehemiah 8 in the instruction to build the sukkah out of the self-same materials used in the mitzvah of Arba Minim!
2. The Shla"h (cited in Be'ar Heitiv to Orach Hayim 652:3) records the custom of some to make the birkat ha-mitzvah on the Arba Minim in the sukkah, before going to synagogue. Potentially, this custom reflects an intuitive understanding that, again, sukkah and Arba Minim are tightly related mitzvot.

### **Further Reading:**

Adiel Zimrin, "ראש השנה וסוכת בתקופת עזרא (נחמיה ח)"

<http://www.etzion.org.il/vbm/archive/yomyom/i/i42.php>

Da'at Miqra on Nehemiah 8:15, note 18.