

## An Esrog or a Lemon?

### The Halachic method for identifying a real Esrog

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*If you haven't done so yet, chances are that you are searching for a proper set of Arba Minim for the upcoming holiday of Sukkos. Surely, you seek out a beautiful Esrog with which to fulfill this precious Mitzvah. You look at the various Esrogim for sale at your local Arba Minim market, when you notice a significant difference in price between two very similar Esrogim.*

*"What is the difference between these two?" you ask. The seasoned seller replies without blinking: "This one is a Moroccan, the other one, a Braverman". You are too embarrassed to admit that you have no clue what those terms mean. Would one be less kosher than the other? The fact that many of the expensive Esrogim don't have a Pittam just adds to the confusion... In this article, we will attempt to clarify some of the details that pertain to sourcing and authenticating an acceptable Esrog.*

#### **P'ri 'Etz Hadar**

The Passuk states [1]: *"U'Lkahtem lachem bayom harishon p'ri 'etz hadar"* – *"And thou shall take for yourselves, on this first day [the fifteenth of Tishri] a fruit of a tree of 'Hadar'".* The Gemara in Sukkah [2] explains that the Torah is implying that we must use a species in which the taste of its bark and its fruit are the same – one of the characteristics of the *Esrog* (citron, or *citrus medica*). Another identifying feature the Gemara derives from this Passuk is that it *"lives on the water year-round"*, which the Chazon Ish [3] explains to mean that it requires additional irrigation in order to grow, and cannot solely rely on rainwater. This condition is also met with the *Esrog* species.

Although we have a basic tradition as to which fruit the *Talmud* is referring to, defining the boundaries of this species is shrouded in ambiguity. The *Talmud* does not indicate which variations or subspecies of the *Esrog* are still considered to be of the same species. Furthermore, citrus fruits are almost always grafted with one another to achieve certain benefits (sweetness, sourness, color, durability etc.). The *Talmud* does not discuss whether a mixed-breed *Esrog* (i.e. one that is grafted with a lemon) is considered a viable *Esrog* or not.

#### **A Pure Breed**

The Levush [4] writes that one may not use a grafted *Esrog* to fulfill his obligation, as it was created through an *Aveirah* (grafting fruit trees is forbidden as a form of *Kil'ayim*), and is therefore unacceptable before Hashem. This logic implies that there is no intrinsic problem with a grafted *Esrog*, only that it was achieved through an *Aveirah*. Accordingly, if we maintain that there is no prohibition to graft similar citrus fruits – a possibility that the Chazon Ish entertains [5] – an *Esrog* grafted with a lemon would pose no issue.

However, the Acharonim do not follow the opinion of the Levush. The Chazon

*Ish* writes that in order for a fruit to be considered an authentic *Esrog* we must have a tradition that that specific variety is an *Esrog* – something which a grafted *Esrog* lacks. The *Mishna Berura* [6] and Chacham Ben-Tziyon Abba Shaul [זצ"ל 7] also write that a grafted *Esrog* is not considered an *Esrog* whatsoever, since it is mixed with other species.

It is important to note that grafting *Esrog* trees with lemon or bitter orange (*chushchash*) trees is a very lucrative proposition. The *Esrog* tree is extremely delicate and generally only produces proper fruit for around six years. Combining it with stronger breeds can triple the *Esrog* tree's lifespan. [Some have claimed that grafting *Esrogim* with *chushchash* would be acceptable; that would only be possible if we were to classify the *chushchash* as a bona-fide *Esrog*.]

### **Keeping it Real**

The question now becomes how to verify that an *Esrog* was not grafted somewhere along its lineage. This question was posed to the *Rama* in his *Teshuvos* [8], and in his response, he cites the *Maharam Padua* who writes that there are three identifying features that can help us tell apart a grafted *Esrog* from the real thing: 1. A grafted *Esrog* is smooth, whereas a real *Esrog* has bumps. 2. The stem of the grafted *Esrog* sticks out while a real *Esrog*'s stem is sunken in. 3. A grafted *Esrog* is very juicy and has a thin rind, whereas the real *Esrog* does not have much juice and has a thick rind. Additionally, the *Olas Shabbas* writes that one can check the position of the seeds. The seeds of a real *Esrog* will be in a vertical position, whereas the seeds of a grafted *Esrog* will be in a horizontal position. Regarding this identifying feature, the *Bikkure Ya'akov*, cited in the *Mishna Berura*, writes that he has personally checked many *Esrogim* and can attest that the position of the seed should not be a definite indicator.

Let us now examine the various types of *Esrogim* that are commonly used and the source of their tradition.

### **The Moroccan**

Moroccan *Esrogim* have a very strong *Mesorah* and have been used for generations. The *Yishre Lev* (the *Rishon L'Tziyon*, Rabbi Chayim David Chazan from Izmir, 1790-1869) cites three of the greatest *Chachamim* of Morocco who testified that the tradition of the Moroccan *Esrogim* is undisputable and that they were the type that everyone used throughout their lands. Many more *Acharonim* tout the authenticity of the Moroccan *Esrogim* [10]. Rav Moshe Shternbuch שליט"א writes [11] that the Brisker Rav, Rav Yitchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik זצ"ל, would use a Moroccan *Esrog*.

In the year 1981, Rav Yisroel Harpenes, a *Posek* and author from Brooklyn, wrote a *sefer* named "*P'ri 'Etz Hadar*". Citing the fact that the Moroccan *Esrog*'s seeds are not vertical but horizontal, in addition to the fact that it has far less juice than the other *Esrogim* (although *Esrogim* do not have a lot of juice, as previously mentioned, these *Esrogim* are exceptionally dry), Rav Harpenes claimed that the Moroccan *Esrogim* do not meet the conditions that the *Poskim* set to be classified as an *Esrog*.

However, the contemporary *Poskim* reject this claim. Besides the *Bikkure Ya'akov*'s assertion that the seed position test is not as indicative, the

*Poskim* understood that the identifying factors mentioned in the *Rama* should only be applied when one is in doubt whether a specific fruit is an *Esrog* or not. One who has a *Mesorah* – a tradition – that clearly identifies a fruit as an *Esrog*, should not be concerned about these indicators and may safely rely on his tradition.

The *Chasam Sofer* [12] writes that a *Mesorah* for an *Esrog* is like the *Mesorah* for the kosher status of a bird species. Just like one need not be concerned with the identifying factors of a kosher species if he has a reliable *Mesorah* on that species, so too, one may rely on a *Mesorah* identifying a species of fruit as an *Esrog*. [One must still ensure that the *Esrogim* weren't grafted. An upright merchant, with *Yiras Shamayim*, will seek out *Esrogim* from places in which they are carefully maintained and kept pure.]

### **The Yemenite**

Yemenite *Esrogim* also boast a very strong *Mesorah*, and were the *Esrog* of choice of Chacham Ben-Tziyon Abba Shaul. Still, over the years, they have been the subject of a lot of grafting by private growers, as the *Ohr L'Tziyon* warns. The *Sefer "Arba'at HaMinim LaMehadrin"* [13] writes that he once interviewed a Yemenite Jew who prided himself on grafting *Esrogim* to receive the most durable and beautiful fruit. Again, as with the Moroccan *Esrogim*, one should buy from a reliable merchant to ensure that they are sourced from a proper grower.

### **Esrog "Chazon Ish"**

Another very popular species of *Esrogim* are known as *Esrogei "Chazon Ish"*. The species was identified by the *Chazon Ish* himself when he arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* and saw an *Esrog* tree growing in the wild, near *Tzefas*. The *Chazon Ish* proclaimed to his students that these were indeed true *Esrogim*. One of his students, Rav Halperin, took from those *Esrogim* and charged great *Talmide Chachamim* such as Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkovitch זצ"ל, Rav Chaim Greineman זצ"ל, and Rav Gedalia Nadel זצ"ל with growing them with the utmost care. Due to their relatively short *Mesorah* and high level of proper supervision they pose no concerns of grafting.

### **Yanover, Braverman**

The *Chassidim* (especially Chabad and Satmar) seek out the *Yanover Esrogim*, which were originally grown in Genoa, a city in Northern Italy. The *Chasam Sofer*<sup>[14]</sup> writes that they have a strong *Mesorah* dating back to *Rabbeinu Tam* and the Sages of *Ashkenaz*, if indeed they can be traced back to that same region. Today, many of these *Esrogim* are grown in Calabria, a region in Southern Italy. Another brand of *Esrogim* known as the "Braverman" *Esrogim*, also have a *Mesorah* and were allegedly used by the *Maharil Diskin* (Rav of Brisk and Yerushalaim, 1818-1898).

### **With a Pittam or without?**

Many are confused by the fact that some *Esrogim* do not have a *Pittam* (carpel). ["*Chazon Ish*" and Yemenite *Esrogim* do not have a *Pittam*, while Moroccan *Esrogim* have a *Pittam*.] The *Rama* [15] cites the *Rosh* who writes that if an *Esrog's* *Pittam* falls off then it is not valid – unless it never had one to begin with. The *Poskim* grapple with the meaning of this *Rosh*, since every *Esrog* starts off with a *Pittam*.

Rav Chaim P. Sheinberg זצ"ל and Rav Meir Brandsdorfer זצ"ל are of the opinion that since we do not know the true meaning of the *Rosh*, one should only use an *Esrog* with a *Pittam*. Others say that the *Rosh* means that as long as the *Pittam* fell off while the *Esrog* was still connected to the tree, or, according to some, before the *Esrog* reached a third of its growth (an important milestone for many *Halachos*, such as *Ma'aser*, etc.), then the *Esrog* is acceptable.

It is important to remember that despite the fact that many of the brands of *Esrogim* have a strong *Mesorah* throughout *Am Yisrael*, one must always ensure he is buying from a G-d fearing merchant who will ensure to source his *Esrogim* properly.

**Sources:**

[1] ויקרא כו, מ [2] ל"ה ע"א [3] כלאים סי' ג' אות ז' [4] סי' תרמט ס"ד [5] שם, ומעלה שיש להתיר ע"י עכו"ם [6] סי' תרמח ס"ק סה [7] אול"צ ח"ד פל"ה ס"ז [8] סי' קב [9] שם [10] כ"כ בבכורי יעקב, והגד מרדכי סי' ה', זכר יהוסף ח"ג רל"ב בית שמחה סי' א' ועוד [11] תשובות והנהגות ח"א סי' שפא [12] שו"ת חאו"ח סי' ר"ז [13] עמ' רעד [14] שם [15] סי' תרמט ס"ז