**Learning from Sukkot: Embracing Inclusivity and Diversity**

**# 1**

**Midrash**

The four species of the Lulav represent four different types of Jews:

* The *Esrog* (citron) has a good taste and a good fragrance. It represents a person with both wisdom (Torah learning) and good deeds.
* The *Hadas* (myrtle) has a good fragrance, but is inedible. It represents a person who has good deeds, but lacks wisdom.
* The *Lulav* (date palm) is edible, but has no smell. This represents the person with wisdom, but without good deeds.
* The *Aravah* (willow) has neither taste nor smell. It represents a person with neither good deeds nor Torah learning.

On Sukkot, we gather these four species, bind them, and wave them all together. The Lulav is only kosher if all four species are taken together. If one of the species is missing, the entire Lulav is invalid.

Bringing them together represents our unity as a nation—despite our external differences.

**Questions:**

* **What type of people do you enjoy being around? Why?**
* **What type of people do you not enjoy, but can tolerate if necessary?**

**#2**

Imagine your community began to welcome neo-Nazis. You'd probably feel excluded because they are clearly entirely opposed to all of your values.

We all have our hard boundaries, our non-negotiable issues.

If the community includes members beyond those lines, then by definition we become excluded.

This brings us to a paradoxical truth: *inclusivity* by definition *excludes*.

(Backstory) Rabban Gamliel was president of the yeshiva, and was harsh to one of his students on multiple occasions. Eventually this led to a revolt, and he was replaced with Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria. The new leadership changed the entry requirements:

**Talmud Berachot 27b-28a**

*Rabban Gamliel allowed entry only to those “whose insides were like their outsides”, those of unquestioned piety, going so far as to appoint a guard at the entrance to the Yeshiva to prevent “undesirables” from entry.*

*Clearly, this policy worked all too well. The first act of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria was to remove the guard, opening up the Yeshiva to all. So many wanted to learn that they had to bring in 400—and some say 700—extra benches to accommodate all.*

**Question: What type of people would you absolutely not be able to tolerate? Explain!**

**#3**

The vast number of needy people and our limited resources mean that we have to establish priorities.

Our Sages learn that the language of the Torah itself contains the key to these priorities:

**Torah, Devarim 15:7-8**

*"When there will be a needy person from among your brethren, in one of* ***your gates*** *in your land that the Lord your G-d has given you, don't harden your heart and don't close your hand from your needy brother.*

*Surely open your hand and lend him according to his need that is lacking to him."*

**Rashi**

*The mention of "your gates" indicates that the poor of your city precede those from other cities.*

You must focus your charity primarily on the needy of your city – which means you must exclude even possibly needier people from neighboring cities.

**Questions:**

* **Do you ever find yourself behaving more kindly, patiently, generously to strangers than you do to your close friends and family? What are some examples?**
* **Why do you think that happens?**
* **How do you look at this phenomenon in light of today’s discussion?**
* **What practical steps can you take to bring your behavior more in line with the truths we discussed today?**