

You shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of a citron tree. (23:40)

Pri eitz hadar, “the fruit of a beautiful tree,” is commonly accepted as referring to the *esrog* tree. In *Sefer Likutim*, the **Arizal** says that the letters of the word *esrog*: *aleph, taf, reish, gimmel* form an acronym for the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* 36:12, *Al tevoeini regel gaavah*, “Let not the foot of arrogance come to me.” **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, explains this pragmatically. The *pasuk* in which David *Hamelech* deploras arrogance and prays that it not affect him in any way, is truly a *pasuk* fitting for the *esrog*. This could be termed the “*esrog’s* prayer,” for the *esrog* is the one fruit that has a right to be arrogant. It is a beautiful fruit, completely unblemished, with nary a spot and bumps out of place, perfectly symmetrical, and very expensive. It is the specie of the “four species” that symbolizes the Torah Jew who observes *mitzvos*, studies Torah and performs acts of lovingkindness. It is the fruit replete with laudatory qualities, the fruit that all other fruits “envy.” Thus, it prays to Hashem not to allow it to become arrogant, to elevate itself above others.

In *Shaar Avodas Elokim* 4, the *Chovas Halevavos* relates a dialogue between a *chasid* and his students. The *chasid* said, “If you would not have sins, I would fear something even greater than sin [He was thankful that his students had not achieved spiritual perfection.] “What is greater (more egregious) than sin?” they asked. “Arrogance,” the *chasid* replied. Clearly, the *chasid* could not fathom that a sinner would have the audacity to arrogate himself over others. What does he have to lord over others: his sins?

Rav Galinsky relates a well-known episode concerning a middle-aged couple who came to **Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita**, to seek his sage advice concerning an “issue” which was causing tension in their relationship. Apparently, the husband was quite well-to-do. Yet, despite his enormous wealth, he drove a ten-year-old car, which his wife felt was demeaning. She had decided that the time had come for them to purchase a new car. Indeed, she had already selected the color!

Rav Shteinman looked at the husband and asked, “*Nu*, so what is the problem? [As if he had nothing else with which to occupy his time.] Why do you not buy a new car?” “*Rebbe*, I fear an *ayin hora*, becoming the victim of an evil eye.” (If someone will notice the new vehicle and become envious of its owner, it could create an evil eye, which is a sort of spiritual curse).

Rav Shteinman heard this and was impressed. Apparently, this individual did not want to bring attention to himself. He must be a person replete with qualities which people envy. “Tell me,” Rav Shteinman asked, “can I test you on *Shas*?” “What – am I a *Kollel* fellow; that I study all day, so that I can master the entire *Talmud*?”

“I understand,” countered Rav Shteinman, “Perhaps you have mastered one or two *sedarim* of the *Talmud*?” “*Rebbe*, I said that I am not a *Kollel* fellow; I have not mastered an entire *Seder*.” “Perhaps you are proficient in one *meseches*, tractate?” “No, not even one tractate. I am a simple

layman,” the man replied, somewhat agitated.

“Let me see,” replied *Rav Shteinman*, “You have neither mastered *Shas*, nor are you proficient in even one *Seder*. Worse, you claim not to have completed even one tractate! Yet, you fear someone’s envy? Why would anyone be envious of you?” (The sage was intimating that if his only quality was wealth, it was not worthy of envy. Thus, he had nothing to worry about concerning *ayin hora*.)

Rav Galinsky concludes with a powerful statement from the *Ohaiv Yisrael*, the **Apter Rav, zl**, who said, “There is no reason to have a discussion concerning arrogance. All one has to remember is, ‘Nine *Apter Rav*s (individuals of such distinction) do not comprise a *minyan*, quorum. Ten *baalei agalah*, wagon drivers (representative of the simple, usually illiterate Jew), create a *minyan*, which is a setting for *kedushah* and *Kaddish*. It becomes, a place to which the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, comes and goes.”

It is not who one is, with whom he is affiliated, from whom he descends, or how much money he is worth: it is before Whom he stands – *Hashem Yisborach*; and, before Him, we are all the same. Even the *esrog*, by itself, without the support of the other three species, each representing another aspect of *Klal Yisrael*, does not effect the *mitzvah*. It requires all four *minim*, species. *Moshe Rabbeinu* clearly represented the *esrog* of *Klal Yisrael*. Yet, when the nation sinned with the Golden-Calf, Hashem told him *Lech reid*, “Go down,” from your high position (*Shemos* 32:7). A leader is only as exalted as his flock. When the flock fails, he fails.

I will add that, when one is endowed with a special gift, be it exceptional acumen, illustrious lineage, material abundance, all of which he uses properly for the betterment of others – while it is no reason to arrogate oneself – he is certainly worthy of *kinaas sofrim*, the envy of scribes, which spurs one to greater growth. One who truly cares about achievement is spurred on by the desire to emulate, and even surpass others. This form of jealousy may not be the ideal, but, if it serves as an incentive, it cannot really be that bad.